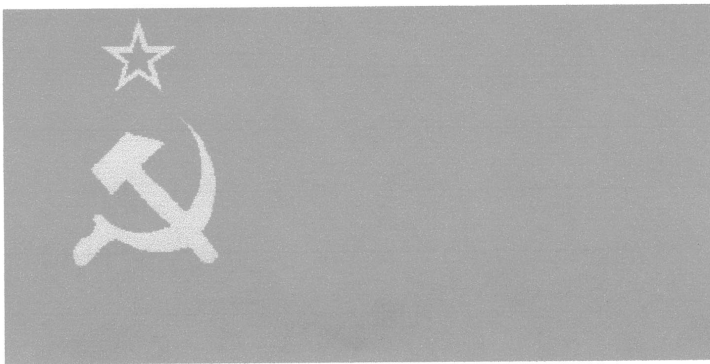
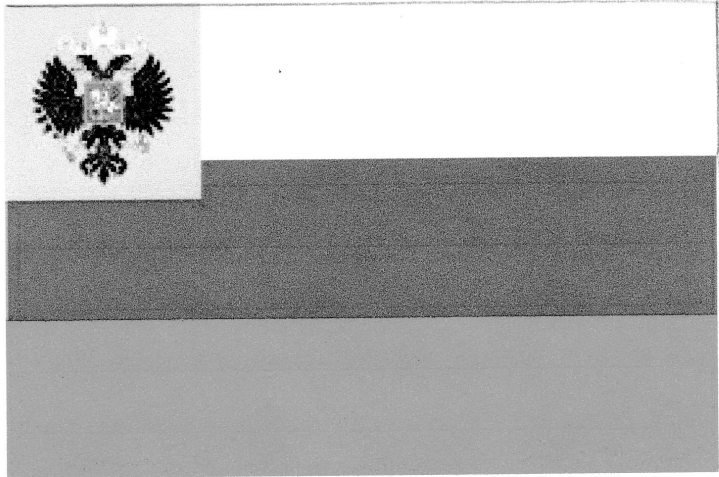




Military Training 10th grade class in the courtyard of the Ten-Years-School in Slavyansk, Ukraine. On the left, instructor of Military Training; from right to left, the girls: Raya Gunicheva, Olga Gladkaya (Gladky), Lena Tarasenko, Lora Krylova, Raya Kirichenko, Musia Davidenko, Sonya Tretyakova, Ala Sobchenko, Valentina Lysykhina. Fall 1939. Photo by Vladimir Dobry.



# Caught in the Web of History

Nikita S. Khrushchev's Teacher and Her Family  
Remember the Sweep of Events  
That Destroyed the Life of Millions

by

Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Orest M. Gladky

Olga Gladky Verro

Giulio Verro

Compiled, Translated and Edited

by

Olga Gladky Verro

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*"Cought in the Web of History"  
Could not have been completed*

*Without*

*Including my father's numerous short stories and my mother's memoirs in which they described people and events in their lives. Their writings inspired me to collect additional information from them and from other living relatives and friends, to combine it all with my own recollections, and to write additional chapters; then to compile it in chronological order in one comprehensive story of our family that was cought in the web of historical events that occurred in the midst of our lives.*

*This work could not have been completed*

*Without*

*My father's and my mother's encouragement to continue their work;*

*And Without*

*My husband's affection and unconditional dedication and help in this endeavor  
and his recollections of events occurred in his and our life.*

## Acknowledgments

I reserve a special expression of love and tender feelings of gratitude for my husband, Giulio Verro, who patiently endured in helping me with the ménage and surrounded me with affection and understanding throughout many years that I pursued translating, writing, editing, and compiling "Cought in the Web of History". I could not have come this far without his help and dedication.

Also, special appreciation is reserved for my husband Giulio Verro in writing the Volumes Two and Three. Without his collaboration and active participation it could not have been completed. His numerous photographs, documents, and recollections about the life and experiences in the Legionnaire Air Force Squadron during the Civil War in Spain and in the Italian Air Force, before and during World War II and his recollections about the time he was in the Italian prisoners of war camp in Germany contributed invaluable material for many chapters. And, most of all, the life under the Soviet Army occupation of Poland and his and my desperate efforts to remain together after the end of War could not have been as vividly described without his contribution in writing numerous episodes that we have experienced together, as did also many displaced persons in that difficult and historical time in the post-World War II Europe.

Special gratitude is extended to my very dear friend, Oliver W. Kellogg, long time editor-publisher of weekly newspapers in Iowa and Minnesota, for his time and patience, for his valuable advice in editing the manuscript, for his encouragement during preparation stage for publishing and, most of all, for his editing of the final draft.

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Numerous contributions to these memoirs by many family relatives and friends are acknowledged with gratitude and their names are annotated throughout the text. Especially should be noted contribution of my cousin Vladimir Berezhnoy (Wladimir Bereschnoy as spelled in Canadian and German documents) and his wife Raisa Zagoroyko Berezhnoy for providing extensive and detailed information about their branch of the family.

An appreciation is reserved for my son Piero Verro and my daughter Lia Verro Zygmunt for their constant reminding me that this work had to be published soon.

Grateful acknowledgement is extended to Molly Hedgecock for her encouragement of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky in translating from Russian into English her unpublished manuscript, "Nikita Khrushchev In My Memoirs," and for reviewing its first draft.

Deserved recognition goes to Susan Snowden who performed line editing of a large portion of Volumes I and II and to Sharon Broyer who performed partial line editing of the first draft of Volume I.

# Introduction

By Olga Gladky Verro

"Caught in the Web of History" describes how history, people, and events touched the lives of the members of one family and how they affected their fate. However, these events affected and destroyed the lives of millions who lived in Russia, Soviet Union, Ukraine, Poland and Baltic states. It includes the periods before and during the Revolution of 1917-18, during the Civil War of 1919-1922, during the historical experiment of the Communist regime, Bolshevik oppression and Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union from 1922 until the German attack in 1941. It includes episodes that happened during the World War II: German occupation of the Ukraine and Gestapo concentration camp; labor and prisoners of war camps in Germany; and NKVD camp on the territory liberated by the Soviet Army where the apprehended civilian German men were processed and quickly deported to reconstruct Soviet Union. It concludes with the end of World War II and the struggle of millions of refugees in the post-war Europe from being forcibly deported "home" by the Soviets.

It was compiled from published and unpublished materials written through the years from 1945 to 2008 by: by my mother, Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky, my father, Orest Mikhaylovich Gladky, and those written by me, Olga Gladky Verro.

The text includes the entire unpublished manuscript, "Nikita Khrushchev In My Memoirs," written in 1967 by my mother Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky. In it she describes her personal experience of teaching, 1922-1924, the former leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, and her further encounters and contacts with this historic personality. In the introduction to her "Memoirs" Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky wrote:

"Although many details of the events which took place many years ago have somewhat faded in my mind, those things that I remember about Khrushchev may provide the reader with the image of a simple Russian man who emerged during the Revolution of 1917 from the unknown masses to play a very important part in Russian history. The Revolution gave to Khrushchev and many others the chance to gain the power by their shrewdness and persistence."

It includes in whole or in parts the published and the unpublished works by my father, Orest Mikhaylovich Gladky, who wrote short stories between 1945 and 1983, published mostly in the immigrant's newspapers and journals, all of which were based on real life episodes that happened to him, his family, his friends, and others. He describes unique, but experienced by many, episodes about White Army volunteers in the defending Russia against the revolutionary Reds; about the plight of the peasants during collectivization; and about the struggle of the individual for survival under CheKa, KGB and NKVD unrelenting search and annihilation of the "enemies of the people" as were coined the persons suspected to be disloyal to the Bolshevik dictatorship.

It also includes description of life in one Italian family before, during, and after WW II, and episodes from the Italian Legionnaire Air Force activities in Spain, in 1937-1938, during the Spanish Civil War as recounted by my husband, Giulio Verro, and from

the records he kept in his airplane's "Book of Flight."

I recorded and wrote the chapters on: the family ancestors from about the middle decades of the 1700's and thereafter; the family history as recounted by my father and my mother, my husband, Giulio Verro, and my own recollections of the events that occurred before, during and after World War II. I also infused the material with information from the letters, tapes, and telephone communications with my relatives and friends. Then I compiled the final manuscript in chronological order and adapted, revised, and enriched the collected material to overlay family history on the background of historical events. I have also translated into English all materials that were written or recounted in Russian, German, French, and Italian.

All the material included in "Caught in the Web of History" has been presented as objectively as possible, however, no one could have been a completely neutral observer of the historical events that took place during those difficult times. Each chapter reflects the values and traditions of its writer received from his or her family, the influence of social milieu, and the personal experiences of their lives. It shows how each writer felt, the hardships each endured trying to adapt to life as imposed by the Revolution and by the Civil War in Russia, by the Communist regime and Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union, by the German occupation, by World War II, and by post World War II events.

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# Volume One

*Volume One of "Cought in the Web of History" is dedicated  
In memory of my dear parents,  
My mother, Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky (1895-1999)  
And  
My father, Orest Mikhailovich Gladky (1902-1983)*

*The first draft of Volume One of "Cought in the Web of History"  
With title "Touch of History in our Lives"  
was presented with love as a gift to my mother,  
Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky,  
in celebration of her one hundredth birthday on February 23, 1995*

# Prolog

*In Kilkenny, Ireland, Brother John Clyn of the Friars Minor, another monk left alone among dead men, kept a record of what had happened lest "things which should be remembered perish with time and vanish from the memory of those who come after us." Sensing "the whole world, as it were, placed within the grasp of the Evil One," and waiting for death to visit him too, he wrote, "I leave parchment to continue this work, if perchance any man survive and any race of Adam escape this pestilence and carry on the work which I have begun."*

*Brother John, as noted by another hand, died of the pestilence, but he foiled oblivion.*

Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror, the Calamitous 14th Century*, Ballantine, 1978, pp. 92-95.

## In Whose Name?

By Orest M. Gladky and Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

The winter of 1917 was mild and snowy in the Ukraine, the southern region of Russia. Far away on the western front, in deep trenches covered with snow, Russian soldiers defended their country from their enemy, the Germans. They sacrificed not only their flesh and blood, but also their lives in Russia's name.<sup>1</sup>

Those who were on the home front suffered along with them. The war was a heavy burden on the country and its people, but enduring it meant preserving the honor and the glory of Russia. Therefore, the inconveniences and hardships of wartime were accepted by the people as a duty and an inevitable adversity they had to bear. "At the front the soldiers suffer much more than we do here, standing in line for provisions." That was how many Russians felt at the time.

It was a calm winter evening. Delicate, fluffy snowflakes whirled slowly as they descended to the ground. They fell on the faces of passers-by, on their eyebrows and eyelashes, covering their hats and babushkas with soft down. The snow emanated a radiance of an exceptional, mysterious tenderness that had been sent to earth from a far away sky. Perhaps that radiance was even holy, but the people on the streets were indifferent to it. Their minds were absorbed with thoughts beyond ordinary, everyday events.

Suddenly the seeming tranquility of the evening was changed by the gusts of a sharp, biting wind. Snowflakes eddied rapidly in the powerful currents of air and blinded the eyes of the hurrying people. But the anxious townsfolk noticed neither snow nor wind. They were engrossed in the foreboding rumors that had already reached the province from the capital. They waited impatiently for paperboys to rush out of the local printing houses into the streets with hot-off-the-press newspapers. They anxiously expected to hear boys' ringing voices shouting the latest news. Worried people ran towards them, hastily paid for a newspaper and, without waiting for their change, hurried to an illuminated store window or to a streetlight under which they could read. They wanted to see with their own eyes the words they had just heard in the discordant chorus of naive boys as they proclaimed unexpected, striking news:

"Revolution in Petrograd!<sup>2</sup>... Revolution in Petrograd!"

"The Czar has abdicated!"

"Abdication of the Monarch!"

"Revolution in Russia!"

The piercing, troubling voices of the paperboys spread further and further down streets and alleys, reaching every home, disturbing and agitating an established way of life, frightening the inhabitants and overwhelming them with an awful feeling of uncertainty.

The people received the news in different ways. Those who felt comfortable with the established way of life were stricken with fear of an approaching catastrophe. Those who believed in the promises of the revolutionary slogans were ready to follow the revolution. Others—the opportunists—kept quiet, waiting for the right moment to

fulfill their frustrated ambitions. Some conceitedly believed themselves to be the saviors of the fatherland with new government... And some—the Knights of Honor—joined the ranks of those now marching to save Russia and to preserve law and order. Yes, the Czar had abdicated, but, in whose name?

The war against Germany continued; however, the front line staggered. Influenced by the revolutionary infiltrators that spread tempting slogans—especially those that promised, “All land to the peasants!”—soldiers abandoned the battlefields and ran home to their villages, expecting the promised redistribution of land that had been seized from the landowners.

In the cities, towns, and hamlets, meetings and endless rallies went on and on. Schools and clubs—their floors littered with cigarette butts, sunflower seed shells, and spit—became hosts to multitudes of unknown orators, giving them a platform from which they made their speeches. Some of them were revolutionaries; some were social-democrats; still others were socialists of every kind and shading; some were young cadets who believed in the promises of the revolutionary slogans; and some were ordinary criminals now by the Revolution released from the prisons. Without end, one after another, using gestures when they couldn’t find words to express themselves, the orators shouted themselves hoarse threatening reprisals and death to the “bourgeois,” to the “fat capitalists,” to the “exploiters of the working class,” to government officials, to merchants, to White Army officers, to policemen, to the clergy, and to the landowners.

Violent mobs were already breaking shop windows and warehouse doors. Savagely, brutally, mob law began to reign on the streets. Anyone could spark the mob’s fury by grabbing the first suspected “bourgeois,” who was held guilty merely because he owned a house, or a store, or because he was a lawyer, or a judge, or a doctor, or a policeman.

Ominous, threatening voices resounded everywhere:

“Death to the dogs!!! They have drunk enough of our blood!”

“Those vile creatures deserve it!”

“Break, hit, steal everything! It is all ours now!”

A lone man on the street observed it all, listened with bewilderment and watchfully hurried home, not knowing which side he should be on. And he thought, “Haven’t they made a mess of it? Who will put things right now?” And, before falling asleep, he pondered over the foreboding words of “The International,” a hymn borrowed from the French Revolution by the Communists:

“Arise ye workers from your slumbers...

Servile masses arise, arise,

We’ll change henceforth the old tradition

And spurn the dust to win the prize.”

The army, demoralized by all the desertions, began to suffer defeat after defeat. The civil war spread like wildfire into all parts of Russia. The Reds fought for the Revolution, the Whites fought for Russia, and the Greens fought for an independent Ukraine. All these armies behaved as masters of the cities, towns, hamlets, and villages; they plundered the population, confiscated from the peasants grain and other foodstuff to feed their soldiers and destroyed everything in their path.

The Reds mobilized the youth to increase the ranks of their battalions. The Whites accepted volunteers of all ages to replenish their shrinking forces. Petlyura’s

Greens attracted those who for years had secretly yearned for an independent Ukraine. The Red Guards and the White Army fought against each other, and the Greens fought both of them. Towns, hamlets, and villages changed hands many times. In these battles brothers unknowingly killed one another, one dying while defending the Revolution, another while saving his Russia, and still a third dying for a free Ukraine.

Industry stood in ruins; fields stood unsowed. The railroads were nearly at a standstill. Famine and a typhus epidemic decimated the population. Amidst of all these calamities, from the beginning of the Revolution and throughout the Civil War, people continued to do what they could in order to survive. Some were lucky to have jobs or skills that allowed them to provide to some degree for their families; some searched for food in the impoverished countryside; others engaged in the black market. Despite all, the majority of population suffered from hunger and disease.

In the midst of the chaos, most of the schools remained open, due to the selfless labor of many teachers. But, little by little, they began closing down due to lack of funds, fuel and the general devastation of the country.

On one of those worrisome days<sup>3</sup> at the beginning of the Revolution, Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy,<sup>4</sup> who had been a men's tailor for many years, was visited by his former apprentice, Stepan Bolotov,<sup>5</sup> nicknamed Styopa, but everybody called him Styopka, a pejorative that he fully deserved. Styopa was already displaying proudly the symbol of the Revolution—a red bow attached by a tailor's pin to the front of his cap.

As soon as he entered the house, he solemnly declared, "Well, Gavriyl Daniylovich, the Czar, then, has run from our hot pursuit."

With an exaggerated expression of importance on his face, he pointed to the red bow on his cap and added, "Now, then, we are the masters!"

"But, Styopa," Gavriyl Daniylovich looked at him in amazement, "you are not a revolutionary and you never have been one!"

"Never mind," replied Styopa resolutely, "I will join the revolutionaries tomorrow."

"Besides, you are illiterate," his former Master tried to dissuade him, "you never wanted to learn or to work."

"It doesn't matter," rebutted Styopa, "now I will learn."

Gavriyl Daniylovich looked with disbelief at his lazy apprentice who now wanted to learn something.

"Have you heard," asked Styopa, suddenly raising his voice, "what they've printed in the newspapers?"

Gavriyl Daniylovich just shook his head.

Glaring defiantly at his former Master Tailor, Styopa shouted memorized revolutionary slogans:

"All power to the poor!"

"All land to the peasants!"

"All factories to the workers!"

"All prisoners out of the prisons!"

"End to war!"

Gavriyl Daniylovich was bewildered by this sudden, arrogant outburst by his lazy former apprentice but tried to remain calm and not to raise his voice.

"The devil has possessed you, Styopa," he said crossing himself. "Go to church and pray God to liberate you from the evil spirit."

"Forget about 'your' church!" shouted Styopa extending his arm and pointing accusatorily at his former Master, "Yes, 'your' church!" Then he quickly added with sarcasm, "Soon 'we' will shut down all the churches!"

"Merciful God!" exclaimed Gavriyl Daniylovich who was a devoted Christian. He crossed himself repeatedly, and began to pray.

Satisfied with his bravado, Styopa headed toward the door laughing with malicious pleasure, "Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha! Old man, 'we' will show you who the masters are now!"

For several days after his former apprentice's visit, Gavriyl Daniylovich was troubled by the last words that Styopa said to him, about the churches. Unsuccessfully he was trying to find an answer to what worried him the most: "Why Styopa and his comrades revolutionaries would close all the churches? Why??? And in whose name would they do that? In whose name?..."

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1. Orest M. Gladky, (O. Michailov, pseud.), "Vo ymya chego? – fevral 1917" [in Russian], part 1, *Vo ymya chego?*, MS, TS, 1952, trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (O. Michailov, pseud.) "Vo ymya chego?" [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia*, no.7785 (New York: Rossia Publishing, February 24, 1967), private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. Former name of Saint Petersburg. During World War I with Germany it was renamed from the German name Petersburg to the Russian name Petrograd (1914 -1924); the Bolsheviks renamed it to Leningrad (1924 1991); after the fall of Communist regime it was renamed back to Saint Petersburg in 1991.

3. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "1917-1919 gjdy," part 1, [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniakh* [Nikita Khrushchev In My Memoirs] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967) trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Excerpts by the editor.

4. Father of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, Grandfather of Olga Gladky Verro. See the chapter "Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy."

5. See the chapter "My Native Home."

## The Black Raven

By Orest M Gladky

Translated by Olga Gladky Verro

Edited by Oliver W. Kellogg

Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna Mikhnyevich<sup>1</sup> was a Moscovite.<sup>2</sup> In her gray-blue eyes and in her kind smile always shined the joy of life. She lived by a deep faith in God and in Mother Russia. She guided herself by faith in the family and in school, already teaching a second generation of children. Jokingly, she would tell her adult former students that she probably would teach their grandchildren and to develop their minds and thirst to learn. Her faith came from deep in her soul, heart, and mind without turning her life into an extreme of self-denial and austerity. Within the family and in the company of good friends one could hear very often the ringing peal of her laughter.<sup>3</sup>

She loved the Russian olden times, and held firmly to their time-honored customs and traditions. She perceived extraordinary beauty in that time gone by and was able to present its richness in symphony of words in which one heard sincere love for mother country.

In a simple child's story, "Kolobok,"<sup>4</sup> which she often told to her small son Igor, even the adults would lose the reality. Her speech murmured as a happy stream and one didn't know where one was, in the world of *Kolobok* of childhood fantasy or in the reality of a comfortable living room chair. And in velvet tones, which flowed as the waves of the River Don, she would tell a Russian epic, *bylina* of "Ill'ya Muromets," Then from the dead past would rise the ancient Russian heroes with the strength and glory of Holy Russia. That could be followed by the story of "Boris Godunov," or by "Poltava"—the same Russia in the rhymes of poet genius Pushkin—that in her marvelous narration would transform the listener to a participant in the past-time deeds. It was not by chance only that Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna was the reader of the text accompanying the magic lantern shows for the pupils that were shown in those days before motion pictures. Then the stationary figures appearing on the screen would come to life and the "three maidens sitting under the windows" suddenly would begin to spin swiftly, their smiles to breathe with life, their eyes to sparkle with maidenly eagerness, and almost could be heard the dear-to-heart Russian voice saying, "If I was the Czarina..."

She knew more than anyone all the ancient ceremonies and folklore of good and bad omens. Sometimes, just before the New Year, she would align a dozen of cups with the chopped onions and foretell, "June will be rainy, and July – dry; there will be good crop and harvest in good weather..." And it happened that way.

Life was simple, but overflowing with the riches of heritage from the past. It was a good life! And in her prayers she always raised and poured forth her gratitude to God for granting prosperity to her native land.

During difficult years of war for the honor of motherland and for the celebration of the orthodox faith, her face overshadowed with indelible wrinkles. Somewhere, far away on the front, Russian fighting men were dying. Was it possible to be indifferent during the years which weighed so heavily on the country? And in her fervent prayers she was not the only one who with eyes wet with tears appealed in prayers for granting victory to the soldiers of Russia...

But then came the year of 1917. Incomprehensible. Terrible. Ugly. It resurrected the year of 1905 from the darkness of Hell. Her wrinkles and gray hair tripled. There no more could be heard her rolling and ringing laughter. And there was not even a hint of her sweet smile.

Revolution! Revolution!

And in faraway Saint Petersburg, that by the will of the Czar was renamed now as Petrograd, on the stage of history was being played a cynical and sinister farce. Suddenly, a defender of the criminals, who called himself Lenin, emerged as head of the Russian State; he was as a jester in a funeral procession shouting disgusting profane, demeaning drivel.

Thus did Russia stumbling into the abyss...

At times at the dinner table Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna would take a piece of bread, look at it sorrowfully and say, "Now even the bread is not the same—without the letter "yat" and without the "hard sign" letter."<sup>5</sup> "Yat" was the inside of bread, its soft part, and the "hard sign" letter at the end was the crust.. One would eat it and know that it is bread in your mouth and not the worthless chaff of revolution.

More gray hair, deeper wrinkles on her face, her heart bleeding from the terrible premonitions...

One day one of the local super-revolutionaries asked her casually, "What is the matter, Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna, why did you become quiet? Where is your laughter full of life? Where is your joy of life?"

"Russia is on the death bed; one needs to cry and pray God for salvation!"

"No, Russia is on the operating table."

"That's even worse. Father Krylov used to say in his fable,

*It is a misfortune when a shoemaker starts to bake the cakes  
and the pastrymaker to repair the shoes...*

You will kill Russia on your operating table!"

During the Christmas-tide, as usual, the small apartment resounded with the strident voices of youth. From the other towns would come home and gather together students from gymnasiums, royal, commercial and technical schools, and various specialized courses, the sons and daughters, nephews, and nieces, friends and girlfriends. A place was found for all, only the noise and the energy of youth not to be contained within the white walls of the rooms and so to burst forth into gloriously frosty days and star-covered nights.

The Christmas tree celebrations were over. The year of 1918 was nearing fast. And then, the thirty-first of December. It was the last day of the year 1917, the year that birthed the monstrous child that was destined to grow too evil to be christened.

Toward midnight the ring of youthful voices echoed in the rooms. They had opened wide the porch door and aroused the household:

"Mama!"

"Aunty!"

"Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna!"

"Let's do the fortune telling!"

"Let me to be the first today," said Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna. "What will happen to Russia?..."

On the upside-down dinner plate in the yellow flame burns the crumpled piece of paper. It emits the smoke, becomes black, and transforms into a fragile mass of indefinite form. Dozens of eyes intensely seek to catch and identify the contours of its shadow from the candle light. Suddenly the contrast is clear and contours on the wall appear as a burial mound atop of which is sitting the black raven...

Sorrow engulfed the hearts of all present and the fortune telling on the eve of 1918 went without usual laughter, without secret expectations and joy, without the nebulous desires of love and youthful dreams...

"Russia is going to perish." With this painful thought Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna left from this life to ask the Omnipotent in the next life to save her Mother Russia.

She left not without hope. She believed that the spirit of the Russian heroes would arise and that the courageous epic heroes would awaken and enter the fight with the Fiend of Hell to raise once more that great Russia with her immense richness of her past.

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1. Mother of Orest Mikhailovich Gladky, Grandmother of Olga Gladky Verro. See the chapter "Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna Mikhnyevich".

2. Resident of Moscow.

3. Orest M. Gladky, (O. Michailov, pseud.) "Cherny voron" [in Russian] *Vo ymya chego?*, MS, TS, 1952, 6-7, , trans. by Olga Gladky Verro, ed. Oliver W. Kellogg, 2005. Previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (O. Michailov, pseud.) "Cherny voron" [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia*, no.5034 (New York: Rossia Publishing, January 14, 1953). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

4. Russian folk's story about many encounters of a curious rolling dough ball, named Kolobok, with all kinds of animals and who ends up swallowed by a cunning fox.

5. The two letters that the new Soviet government had relinquished from the Russian alphabet as symbols of the old Church Slavic language. Both letters were a part of the old spelling of the word *khlyeb* [bread].

## Part One

### In The Beginning

*History Books are almost devoid of human details. ...Our pasts are lost so rapidly... Mostly, history deals in generalities: dates, wars, leaders and the broad march of civilization. Almost all of the interesting human details about how our ancestors really lived have been washed away with time—gone forever.*

*Wouldn't it be exciting to read even a brief, 100 word account by your great-great-grandmother telling ...what she and her family were like; how they lived; what thoughts were close to their hearts.*

*Anyone who would put down a simple, direct account... in the future centuries it would be the only such account in existence. Have [your parents] tell you about their own parents in detail and ...what they can remember about their grandparents. ...All you have to do is make a record of the simple, everyday things you see, feel and hear around you—and pass them on to posterity.*

Robert G. Voelker, "How to start a family history," *Modern Maturity*, Aug.-Sept. 1981, p.36.

# The Origins Of The Berezhnoy Family

As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

The origins of the Berezhnoy family can be traced to the village of Nikolskoye in the Nikolsky Rural District of the Ysyumsky Provincial District that was then under the jurisdiction of the Kharkovsky Province. It was located in the south-eastern part of Russia, which long ago was known as *Malorussia*<sup>1</sup> or *Okraina*<sup>2</sup> and later became known by its present name *Ukraina*, or the Ukraine.

The village got its name from the family name of its first landowner, Nikolsky, who long ago had received this land along with a number of peasant serfs from the Czar as a reward for his services to the Crown. This was the customary recompense in feudal Russia for many years until the Agrarian Reform of 1861 liberated the serfs.

During this period of serfdom, peasant serfs were attached to the lord of the manor who owned them, and, according to the existing law, could sell them and punish them at his own discretion. It was well known that in feudal Russia some despotic serf-owners mistreated their subjects, used harsh corporal punishment, and divided serf's families by selling their members to other landlords located far from their native villages.

But the peasants in Nikolskoye had no such bad recollections about several generations of landlords in their village. They didn't remember that anyone was ever sold and the original serfs' families remained in the village for many years; they didn't recall, either, that any of their landlords used corporal punishment or in any way mistreated their subjects. Also, there was no record of any mutinies in the history of the village.

It appears that for many years the landlords in Nikolskoye treated their serfs fairly and provided for their subjects' according to the prevalent customs. Their interest was to have healthy, strong, and content serfs to work on their land and to take care of the manor. Then they could expect the serfs to perform their duties according to the existing rules. This way, the serf-owners preserved their status quo, to which they believed they were entitled; and the serfs accepted their status quo, to which they believed they were born. For several generations the wise landlords in Nikolskoye had maintained this equilibrium.

All the landlords in feudal Russia provided sustenance and living quarters for their serfs, but each landlord had his own system of taking care of his subjects. Nikolskoye was a prosperous village and peasant serfs lived with their families in cottages on land owned by the lord of the manor. They depended on their owner for their basic provisions. They then had to supplement their family's needs by cultivating small vegetable and fruit gardens near their cottages and by keeping a few chickens in their sheds. And some, who were also skillful at the trades of carpentry, blacksmithing, or wheel and barrel making, exchanged their services with other peasants for whatever they needed. In general, bartering was a common way of getting needed products and

services among peasant serfs.

Having<sup>3</sup> heard what was happening to serfs owned by cruel and despotic landlords in some villages, Nikolskoye's peasant serfs considered themselves to be lucky and used to say, "We should be grateful to our good *barin*<sup>4</sup> who feeds us and treats us fairly as we deserve to be treated."

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1. The Little Russia.

2. The outer boundary of the country.

3. As recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky who heard it from her grandmother Anna Berezhnaya.

4. This how Russian peasants addressed their landlords.

## The Ancestry Of The Berezhnoy Family

As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Village of Nikolskoye was located in a valley<sup>1</sup> near a small river that was a tributary of the River Torets<sup>2</sup>. The peasants' neat, clay-walled, whitewashed cottages peeped out like white handkerchiefs from the dense cherry trees that surrounded them. Thatched roofs resembled big straw hats sitting atop the white walls of the cottages that stood on high clay *zavalinkas*,<sup>3</sup> and small windows winked here and there reflecting the sun's rays. Fences made from interwoven branches looked as huge baskets scattered in picturesque shapes along the streets. These fences divided the vegetable and fruit gardens and court yards from the dusty unpaved roads, where a horse pulling a slow, squeaky cart rarely disturbed barefoot children in plain linen shirts playing a simple game of trundling hoops.

On the southeastern edge of the village, the scattered peasant cottages ran down toward the riverbank, stopping on a small hill where the sun's rays bathed the multicolored carpet of melon fields. Farther down, near the river's shore, the waters of the river nourished flourishing vegetable gardens that belonged to the lord of the manor.

For many years several generations of one family of serfs lived in one of the cottages near the banks of the river. The original landowner had given their ancestor the surname "Berezhnoy," which was appropriate since it meant "the river-shore-dweller." The Berezhnoys were not field serfs who tilled the soil. Rather, they were manor serfs responsible for the maintenance of the manor and the manor house of the *barin*.

Usually the landlord selected as his manor serfs the keen-witted peasants who were masters of one or more trades, who were good laborers, and who were strong and healthy. Traditionally, the position of a manor serf was passed on from father to son, if the son demonstrated that he would be good at that kind of work when he, as a boy, helped his father with the chores.

In the last decades of the 1700's, Ivan<sup>4</sup> Berezhnoy was the manor serf of landlord

Nikolsky. Ivan had inherited from his father the surname Berezhnoy, the position of manor serf, and the right to live in his cottage. Later, Ivan's son Osyp, followed in his father's footsteps. Osyp's son, Daniyl, began working as a young boy alongside his father for the *barin*.

Daniyl Berezhnoy<sup>5</sup> married Anna, the daughter of another manor serf named David. They lived with Daniyl's parents and served at the manor. By his merit, Daniyl earned the right to inherit all the privileges of the manor serf after his father's death.

But Daniyl had a better destiny than his father, Osyp. He received his freedom while he was still young, shortly after his father's death. The freedom came about a year after his marriage to Anna, and soon after the birth of their first son, Stepan, who grew up a free man.

As a result of the Agrarian Reform of 1861, when serfdom in Russia was abolished, Daniyl received from his landlord ownership of the cottage, the same one he lived in as a manor serf, along with the adjoining courtyard and garden, and he continued to live there as a free peasant with his family.

Additionally, the village community, called Mir, received a portion of the landowner's land, which was then divided into strips for each family unit. Daniyl received a strip of land in the fields and began to till the soil for himself. For the use of the land all freed-peasants had to pay the government a tollage, a tax levied in kind, consisting of a certain portion of their crop.

Now that the peasants had received their freedom and with it the land to cultivate, they also assumed the full responsibility of providing for their families, a new task that most peasants in Nikolskoye took in stride.

The soil in that part of Ukraine, called chernozem, or black earth, was naturally rich and produced a plentiful crop. On their allotted land, the peasants planted wheat, rye, sunflowers, and potatoes, which made them self-sufficient in their basic needs for bread, potatoes and oil for their families. Each peasant family also planted some other kind of grain, such as rye, oats, corn, buckwheat, or millet. Those grains were also part of their food staples and provided feed for poultry and livestock. Some also planted hemp for weaving cloth. These products they bartered with one another, an old custom of the peasant serfs that continued for many years among the free peasants. Now that they were free, they also took their products to sell at the markets of the nearby towns of Isyum and Slavyansk.

All the peasants in the village cultivated, around their cottages, small vegetable gardens, as they had done before receiving their freedom. There they planted peas, beans, onions, garlic, dill, and parsley. Cherry and apple trees surrounding the cottages of Nikolskoye provided fruit for family consumption and for sale at the market.

Besides, now that the landlord no longer had serfs, he leased out vegetable garden lots close to the river. Since it was not far from their cottage, Daniyl and Anna took the opportunity to lease a lot on the sunny side of the riverbank. There the soil was rich and water from the river for watering their garden was close by. On the gently sloping hillside they planted melons, watermelons, and pumpkins. Further down, near the shore, they had a vegetable garden where they grew a variety of vegetables: cabbage, cucumbers, carrots, and sweet peppers.

After the serfs became free peasants, the life in the village slowly underwent some changes. The Nikolsky Rural District had a small Office in the village and was in

charge of government administrative business. Besides enforcing the government's laws, recruiting for military service, and maintaining order in the village, now it was also collecting taxes from the peasants.

The State religion was Christian Orthodox<sup>6</sup>, and the church continued to function as a repository of all local civil registries of births, christenings, marriages, and deaths. All family contracts were legalized—for the government and for the community—in the church after they were consecrated before God, by being blessed by the *Batyushka*<sup>7</sup>, as the Parson was referred to.

The Orthodox Church remained the center of social, spiritual, and community life in the village: all the peasants attended Sunday services; all christenings and marriages were celebrated there, and funeral services were performed there. The peasants also consulted both *Batyushka* and *Matushka*<sup>8</sup> about such matters as what name to give their newborns, about the engagements of their daughters, or about any other matter of a personal nature.

The village church and the Parson were now in charge of the religious education of the peasant boys. They were taught to recite prayers as well as to learn the Old Church Slavonic alphabet, which would then enable them to practice rudimentary reading from the Bible and the New Testament. Attendance was not compulsory, and every father was free to decide whether or not his son should attend lessons and for how long he would send him there to learn.

However, not all changes that happened after the liberation of serfs produced best results for everybody. After receiving their freedom and the strip of land, not all peasants in Nikolskoye prospered at the same pace. Some were not ambitious and were satisfied to provide only food for the family; some were just lazy and neglected their fields resulting in bad crops; some got sick and couldn't take care of their land; some had big families with small children and couldn't produce enough to sell on the market. But the worst problem now was that the peasants had money to spend, and some of that money went into buying alcohol that before was not as easily accessible to serfs. Some spent all their money in vodka and *samogon*<sup>9</sup> and had to sell their strip of land, becoming farmhands. Working for hire for the landlord and for the other peasants, they barely could provide for their families.

But Daniyl and Anna were ambitious; they worked hard and were among those peasants in Nikolskoye who were successful in their farming business. They didn't have a big family and many children to feed. But most important, Daniyl kept himself sober, although he liked to have a glass of vodka on Sundays and holidays.

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1. As remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky (portions heard from her father, Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnuy and from her grandmother Anna Davidovna Berezhnaya).

2. The River Torets is a tributary of the River Donets, which is a tributary of the River Don.

3. Flat, narrow mounds of earth along the outer walls providing support for wooden columns sustaining the roof.

4. The names of the ancestors passed in the family by the word of mouth from one generation to another.

5. Grandfather of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky.

6. After Christian Church schism of 1054 Orthodox Church didn't recognize the supreme authority of the Pope.

7. Father, as refers to a clergyman.

8. Parson's wife.

9. Moonshine.

## How Daniyl and Anna Berezhnoy Lived

As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Now that they were free and worked for themselves and not for the landlord, Daniyl and Anna, like most other peasants in Nikolskoye, worked diligently from sunrise to sundown. Daniyl's family was growing.<sup>1</sup> In 1865, when their first son, Stepan, was about five years old, their second son, Gavriyl<sup>2</sup>, was born and was nicknamed Gavryusha. A few years later their daughter, Kateryna, was born. Daniyl's old mother now looked after their three little children, as did most grandmothers in peasant families. When in her old age the grandmother became sick and frail, Daniyl and Anna took their children with them into the fields.

Daniyl knew farming well and was handy with all the maintenance chores, which he learned when he was a manor serf, and Anna was a thrifty, hard-working woman. They were able to pay a tollage for the field strip to the government and a lease for a lot on the riverbank to the landowner, from whom they also leased a horse.

They used every piece of land for what it could grow best and had enough vegetables, grain, and sunflower oil for the family, as well as feed for the horse and their poultry. This included the winter reserves. From the sale of vegetables at the markets in the neighboring towns of Ysyum and Slavyansk, they saved money for other expenses. Soon they had enough to pay for a new thatched roof on the cottage and then enough to build a new barn. They added more chickens, ducks and geese that they also sold at the market, and started raising pigs.

Anna took good care of her *khata*—that's how peasants' cottage is called in Ukrainian. As did many peasant women in the villages, every summer Anna painted the inside and outside walls of the cottage with whitewash, to make it look neat and tidy. She regularly cleaned the clay floor inside the cottage as well as the *zavalinka* outside by skillfully spreading with her hands a freshly made, soft clay mixture on the surfaces to make them level and even. Then she dipped her hands in a bucket of water and patiently smoothed the surfaces until they became neatly polished. In those days, the peasants considered a clean and tidy cottage a beautiful place to live.

The major feature inside Daniyl and Anna's *khata*—and in most Ukrainian peasant cottages—was a large, multi-purpose hollow brick wall that divided it into two rooms and took up a lot of space. On the kitchen side a brick stove was built against this wall with the chimney leading into it. The stove had a cast iron top with two round holes that could be covered by three sizes of circular covers. This allowed fitting various-sized pots into them to be heated directly over the flame for faster cooking. On one side of the stove there was a built-in oven with metal door.

Next to the stove, stretching all the way to the cottage's back wall, there was a

big baking oven, called *pyech*, with its chimney incorporated into the hollow wall. It was heated with wood and was used primarily for baking bread.

In the other room, incorporated into the hollow brick wall were two warm sleeping nooks. One place, called *na-pyechy*, or an over-the-oven nook, was located high over the baking oven and next to its chimney. It was a wide and roomy chamber with an opening so that one could climb up into it by stepping on a bench. It provided a large, warm place where all the children slept on a layer of soft hemp. For the elderly who had too hard a time climbing up to the over-the-oven nook, there was another warm place to sleep called a *lezhanka*, or a stove-couch. It was a low nook inserted into the hollow brick wall behind the kitchen stove and its chimney. In the second room there was also a large family bed, consisting of a low wooden platform upon which several people could sleep lying sideways or lengthways, facing all in one direction or in opposite directions.

In the fall, all the sleeping places were covered with a soft layer of hemp. The hemp was changed often, and when it was removed, a layer of straw was used in its place. During the long winters the used hemp was made into yarn and woven into linen cloth on a simple loom. Most of the peasants' clothing—shirts, breeches, skirts, and aprons, as well as their towels—were made from this homespun linen cloth. However, Anna managed to purchase inexpensive cotton muslin with a small flower print for a blouse to wear to church on Sundays.

To cover themselves during the cold winter nights, each one used his winter coat, either a *kozhu* made of sheepskin and worn woolly side in, or a quilted coat, which was also worn outdoors during the day. Later, when the family had some money to part with, a quilted blanket was purchased for the bed and its loose straw was replaced by a straw mattress. The pillows were stuffed with either hemp or straw, because any feathers plucked from chickens or down plucked from geese was sold to make additional income for the family. Near the walls were several long, wide benches and a long trunk in which Anna kept linen towels and clean clothes. These were used for sleeping on during the hot summer nights.

Like all of their neighbors, Daniyl and Anna were not pretentious about their furniture, most of which had been passed down from father to son. They had only a few rustic, functional pieces made from unfinished wood by the village carpenter. In the kitchen against the back wall stood a large, open cupboard where Anna kept pots and pans, kitchen utensils, and a few cups and bowls. She also stored there staples such as flour, grains, dry beans, dried peas, oil, and salt. Near the stove there was a small table where she prepared food and mixed bread dough for baking. In the kitchen stood also a low, round table, which Anna diligently scrubbed every week and where they had their meals sitting on small low benches. Above the table, in the corner, hung a small icon adorned with a linen towel, called a *rushnik*, and from the ceiling hung a little candleholder. Anna lit the candle only at dinnertime on Sundays and on holidays, as the candles were expensive.

Water was kept in a big wooden barrel standing near the outside entrance. Anna had to fetch water from a well that served many families. She hauled it in two buckets hung on the ends of a wooden yoke placed across her shoulders.

Usually the family ate the evening meal together when everyone had returned from work.. There was only one utensil to use during the meal, a large, round, wooden

spoon. There were no individual plates, bowls, knives, or forks. Anna would put a big, round loaf of dark, coarse, homemade bread in the center of the table and a long knife, and next to it a large bowl full of steaming-hot *borshch*.<sup>3</sup>

When the family sat down to eat, nobody would start eating until Daniyl said thanks to God for their daily bread. Then, each person would cut a thick slice of bread from the loaf, take a bite out of it and then scoop *borshch* from the bowl with the wooden spoon that could hold more than one mouthful. To keep the liquid from spilling onto the table, each person would carefully accompany the spoon with a slice of bread and hold it under the chin while sipping liquid and eating vegetables until the spoon was empty.

When everyone was finished eating *borshch*, Anna would place either *kasha*—a porridge made of any kind of cooked grains, millet, buckwheat, wheat, or oats—or boiled potatoes on the table and they would eat it with a piece of salted lard or with a condiment of coarsely chopped onions golden-fried in sunflower oil.

In the winter, when they didn't go to the fields, at midday they also had steaming hot boiled potatoes with a piece of salted lard and sauerkraut, pickles, or pickled tomatoes. Or they had *kasha* served with a fried onion condiment; or later, when they had their own cow, *kasha* was served with milk and mashed pumpkin baked in the big oven. In the winter, when there was no fresh fruit or melons, Anna also baked large slices of sweet pumpkin in the oven. She roasted pumpkin and sunflower seeds and everybody kept enough of them in their pockets to snack on at any time. Poultry and eggs were reserved for the big holiday dinners and for sale.

Since Daniyl and Anna left home before dawn, there was no time to cook breakfast; everybody hurriedly ate leftovers from the previous evening's meal. At midday in the spring, summer, and autumn, they ate in the fields where they worked, or in a hut in the middle of the melon field. The food was simple—a piece of coarse bread and a slice of lard brought from home with a cucumber, a tomato, or green onion picked from the garden. In season, they ate lots of melons, watermelons, cherries, and apples.

One of the most important, time-consuming chores for Anna, as for all peasant women, was preserving vegetables. This had to be done as soon as they were harvested. Each vegetable had to be preserved in its own special way and placed in an earth cellar dug deep into the ground then covered with more earth.

For pickling in large wooden barrels, pounds and pounds of coarse-grained salt were purchased in town. Cucumbers were picked before they became yellow and full of mature seeds. These were carefully washed and placed in a barrel with fresh dill branches and cloves of garlic cut in half.

Green as well as red ripe tomatoes were pickled in separate barrels. A handful of garlic cloves were thrown between the layers of the green tomatoes; only the red ones had whole sweet red peppers placed here and there among them. Then the right amount of salt was mixed with warm water and poured into the barrels to cover up the cucumbers and tomatoes.

Cabbage and carrots for sauerkraut were coarsely cut with the big knife in even thin slices then placed into a large wooden trough, the same one that was used for laundry and bathing. When all cabbage was cut, Anna would dampen the palms of her hands on a wet cloth and then place her hands on some salt in a deep bowl. Then she would scoop out a handful of cabbage and a few slices of carrots and rub them

between her palms, making the salt adhere to the vegetables and after drop the mixture into a barrel. Bay leaves were sprinkled here and there. Divided by layers of cabbage several rings of sweet-and-sour apples, called *Antonovka*, were placed around the edge of the barrel—this made it easier to retrieve them. Water was not added when pickling cabbage as it made enough of its own juice.

The pickled vegetables in the barrels were covered with a white linen cloth over which was placed a loosely fitting wooden disk. On top of the disk a carefully washed, heavy stone was placed. Each week the stone and wooden disk were lifted and white mold, which had formed during that time, was removed by collecting it in the cloth. The cloth, stone, and wooden disk were then washed thoroughly in a bucket of clean water and placed back in the barrel.

Potatoes were preserved in the cellar in wooden crates and were checked once each month in order to remove any sprouts that were beginning to grow. Spoiled ones were given to the pigs. Carrots were buried in a sandpit dug into the earthen floor; fresh cabbage and beets were carefully placed on wooden shelves built along the walls of the cellar.

Onions and garlic with their wilted leaves left on were dried in the shade. Then the dried leaves were woven into long braids by which they were hung on the kitchen walls. Ears of dry corn, the husks of which had also been similarly braided, were hung in the attic. Pumpkins and bags of sunflower seeds were preserved inside the cottage anywhere they would fit, under benches, under the bed, or in the corners.

At that time, if the peasants had their own piece of land to cultivate and to work for themselves and could meet the basic needs of their families, they felt they were living well. This common Ukrainian peasant saying demonstrates their simple contentment:

"Did you all have enough to eat?"

"Thank God!"

"Did you all have warm place to stay?"

"Thank God!"

"Did you all have clothes to put on?"

"Thank God!"

"Are all in the family healthy?"

"Thank God!"

"What else one could wish for one's family?"

"Thank God!"

Like all peasants in that part of Russia, Daniyl and Anna spoke Ukrainian, but they also understood the Russian spoken by their *barin* and by their customers at the markets in the towns of Slavyansk and Isyum where they sold their produce.

When Daniyl was a young boy, as a son of the manor serf, he worked alongside his father at the landlord's manor. Daniyl had learned from the other manor serfs how to count well enough to keep track of his farming and household needs and the skills needed to keep his farming prosperous.

As the years went by, keen-witted Daniyl and Anna listened to their customers' requests for new kinds of produce. They planted some new vegetables that their sophisticated customers in the nearby towns were willing to pay good money for: summer squash, eggplants, cauliflowers, hot red peppers, green salad and radishes.

While Daniyl was in charge of the fieldwork, Anna took care of both vegetable gardens and melon-field, and they helped each other when needed.

Daniyl and Anna's hard work paid off, and by the time their son Stepan and his wife worked beside them, they had prospered. Later, they bought two horses and a cow of good breeding that produced enough milk to make cottage cheese, sour cream, and butter for the family, as well as for sale at the market.

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1. As recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, who heard it from her grandmother, Anna, and from her father, Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy.

2. Father of Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky.

3. Ukrainian vegetable soup made from potatoes, beans, carrots, beets, cabbage, tomatoes, and onions fried in sunflower oil and flavored with dill.

## Gavryusha Learns The Trade

**As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

Daniyl and Anna's second son, Gavriyl, nicknamed Gavryusha, was a skinny boy with wavy, dark brown hair and lively, inquisitive brown eyes.<sup>1</sup> Gavryusha showed absolutely no resemblance to his blonde, broad-shouldered older brother, Stepan. Even as a young boy Stepan was quick-witted as a good peasant and had the strength to work with his father in the fields. He knew how to handle the horses, when it was time to sow the fields, and when it was time to harvest the crops.

On the contrary, Gavryusha was of a totally different nature; he liked to help out at home with daily chores. He was very observant and curious, always asking for explanations regarding things he did not understand. For example, he wanted to know why, after rubbing the end of a match against the black side of a matchbox, the small ball at the end suddenly became a beautiful light. Nobody could explain this to him.

One day he climbed into *na-pyechy*, or over-the-oven nook, where he slept at night and where nobody would disturb him. He sat on the soft, dry hemp padding, examined the matchbox from all sides, rolled the match between his fingers, rubbed it in the palm of his hand, then struck it resolutely against the rough side of the box and...

Wonder! The beautiful light flashed and illuminated the whole space. He moved the flame closer to the hemp and small, crackling flashes of light began to run all over the hemp. Then suddenly the crackling lights turned into flames.

Gavryusha got scared. He jumped down and ran to his mother screaming, "I set fire to the hemp! I set fire to the hemp!"

"Where? Where?!" asked his frightened mother.

"There, *na-pyechy*! There, *na-pyechy*!"

By the time they arrived with pails of water, the entire padding was on fire. They were lucky that the sides of the nook were made of brick and they were able to

extinguish the fire before it could spread to the cottage walls, which were made of wood covered with a mixture of clay and straw.

After the fire his father asked him, "Why did you set the hemp on fire, Gavryusha?"

"I wanted to find out what fire was made of. But... I couldn't..." replied Gavryusha with disappointment.

Daniyl concluded that, unlike his robust older son, Stepan, for whom farming was a natural choice for the future, his skinny younger son, Gavryusha, was not fit to work on the farm. He talked with his wife concerning Gavryusha's future, and they decided that he didn't have a peasant's nature. He even played differently, not like other children in the village. Although, at that time, he was only seven years old, he was always busy making all kinds of small things. He liked to carve wood to make figures, and he loved to make cages from cane; he also used pieces of leather to make adornments for horse harnesses. But he didn't care to go into the fields.

As a good father, Daniyl made up his mind to look in town for a reputable craftsman with whom he could place Gavryusha as an apprentice so he could learn a good trade.

One day, when their daughter, Kateryna, was sick, as happened often, Anna and Daniyl had to take her to the doctor in the nearby town of Slavyansk. They also took Gavryusha with them, just in case they found a master who would be willing to teach him a trade. In town, Daniyl visited a carpenter and a shoemaker. The carpenter told him that the boy was too young, but the shoemaker agreed to take him the next year when he would turn eight.

So, the next year Daniyl placed Gavryusha with the shoemaker to learn his trade. But Gavryusha had bad luck with the shoemaker, who was a drunkard. He used to send him to buy his vodka and when he was drunk he whacked and hit him for no reason; besides he didn't teach him anything. Gavryusha was not used to this kind of treatment and soon ran away from his master, and, making more than a dozen miles on foot, returned home. He resolutely told his father, "I am not going back to the shoemaker!"

While Daniyl was searching for another tradesman in town, he talked with the village Parson to ask him to accept his son for prayer lessons. To start, the Parson read to the boys from the Book of Psalms and from the Prayer Book, and the children learned to say the prayers by heart. After that, the children were taught the Old Church Slavonic alphabet because the Book of Psalms and the Prayer Book were both written in the Old Church Slavonic language. Gavryusha quickly learned the prayers, and it didn't take him long to recognize letters and put them together to pronounce written words. Although he attended the class for a very short time, it was enough to give him the basics of reading and to enable him to learn later to read and write Russian.

Soon his father placed Gavryusha in Slavyansk as a boy-apprentice with the hatter. There Gavryusha slept on the worktable and was responsible for such chores as cleaning the shop, carrying wood and watching the stove. When he had spare time, he watched the older apprentices sewing caps and the Master cutting out fabric. But the Master did not allow him to try any tasks of the trade.

"You are too young," he told Gavryusha, "Wait a year or two. For now just watch and learn."

But Gavryusha's hands were itching to start making something. So, without a word to anybody, he found a remnant and, in the evening when nobody could see him,

he cut out and sewed a cap for himself. The master didn't like his disobedience and complained to Daniyl about it. But Daniyl had good common sense and understood that his son was eager and ready to learn a trade. He removed him from the hatter and found him another tradesman.

This time he placed Gavryusha with the best men's tailor in town, Master Gaydukov, who was very well known in Slavyansk. Daniyl told his son, "Be obedient, keep both eyes open, and learn all the tricks of the trade. Tailoring is a profitable trade—nobody goes around naked—all people need clothes. If you learn the trade well, you will be your own master, and you will earn enough to provide for yourself and your family."

And this time Gavryusha was in luck. Gaydukov was not only an excellent master, he was also a good teacher and a very kind man. He liked Gavryusha right away because he was obedient and wanted to know everything about the trade. The questions he asked made sense, and most of all, he liked him because he was diligent and Preferred Customer Preferred Customer patient in his work and tried to make everything exactly as the Master showed him.

Gavryusha very much liked staying with Master Gaydukov, not only because he treated him well and always had an answer to his questions, but especially because he always taught him new, more complicated tasks and challenged him to do perfect work.

As was customary in those days, most boy-apprentices lived in the shop, usually slept on the shop table or on the bench, and had their meals of whatever the Master or his wife gave them. In exchange for all of that and for being taught a trade, boy-apprentices had the duty of performing certain chores for the Master in the shop and for his wife in the household. Each master would establish what kind of chores he wanted done.

Gavryusha slept on the tailor's table with the pressing ham<sup>2</sup> serving as his pillow. He ate in the kitchen with the maid and the older apprentices. One of his chores was to get up early in the morning and start a charcoal burning in the big tailoring iron. In the winter, and during the still cold weather in the fall and early spring, he had to first bring in wood from outside and start a fire in the shop stove. Then he would watch the stove during the day and add wood when needed. Also in the morning, he had to bring a pail of water from the well to the kitchen and another to the shop. In the evening, he had to sweep the floor thoroughly and to collect all the pins and needles that had fallen there. Once a week, he had to wash the wooden floor in the shop.

During the day he had to keep a supply of wet pressing cloths next to the pressing charcoal iron and sharpen the tailor's chalk used to draft patterns onto fabric. He also had to thread all the hand-sewing needles with basting and sewing threads, and remember to wax the buttonhole and button-sewing thread. Then he had to stick all the threaded needles neatly to one side of a big pincushion, and stick all the pins to the other side. After the Master had finished cutting out the garment pieces, he had to collect all the remnants of fabric and make neat small rolls of them to be given to the customers for any future repairs.

Of course, he also had to run errands for the Master, notifying customers that their garments were ready for a first or second fitting. He also had to run errands for the Master's wife, if she needed right away something from the store. And, he had to perform any other chore as the need arose. In between all his chores, he observed the

work done by the apprentices and the Master—there was no time allowed for playing with other children.

Master Gaydukov and his wife treated Gavryusha well and they required that their servants and the apprentices treat him the same way. All the apprentices had enough to eat every day; and for holidays all the apprentices and servants had a special dinner.

Master Gaydukov required all the apprentices to be clean and neatly dressed, especially on Sundays and holidays, when they all went to church. Every week one of the servants washed the apprentices' clothes, but they had to iron them themselves after working in the tailor shop. For Christmas Gavryusha always received a present from his master: a pair of new shoes, or a pair of pants, a shirt, or a jacket, whatever he needed as he grew up.

Gavryusha stayed with Master Gaydukov for many years. When he was promoted to the status of apprentice, he was paid accordingly, and he continued to live with the Master. Along with the skills of the trade, he also learned from Master Gaydukov the Russian alphabet; the Master taught him to read and write all words pertaining to tailoring, as these were needed to make records of customers' orders. Gavryusha also learned enough arithmetic to be able take accurate customer's measurements and not only write them down, but also calculate the fractions of inches needed for drafting the patterns to the customer's size.

In time, he learned the trade well and became Master Gaydukov's best senior apprentice. Now he knew how to tailor all kinds of outfits: suits, dress coats, tailcoats, half-seasonal and winter coats with quilted or fur lining; he even mastered the craft of cutting and sewing fur coats and fancy fur collars, as well as leather jackets and coats. And most important to his mastery of tailoring, he learned how to draft patterns for an entire garment directly onto the cloth with the precision of a skillful patternmaker, using only a yardstick and tailor's chalk. The Master was very happy with his apprentice's work and promoted him to master's assistant, increasing his wages accordingly.

Gavryusha grew into a handsome young man with wavy, dark brown hair and a slender build. He was always well dressed, as he could afford to make his own clothes. Having daily contact with wealthy customers who came into the tailor shop, he acquired the good manners of a town dweller and learned to speak Russian. On Sundays, in church, the young girls admired him, and Gavryusha thought it was time to think about marriage. He began to work harder, beyond his regular hours, whenever there was a need to finish some work for the customers, he saved some money, and started to get acquainted with the girls.

While Gavryusha was learning his trade in town, his older brother Stepan got married. He remained to live with his parents together with his wife and five daughters who were born one after another. Only the names of three of their daughters are known: one of them was Fevroniya, nicknamed Khavroshka, another was Alexandra, nicknamed Sasha, and the third was Domna, nicknamed Domochka.

Stepan took over farming in the fields before the time that he was called up for military service. Meanwhile, his parents continued to cultivate the vegetable garden plot and melon field. As an older son helping his parents with the cultivation of the land, and as breadwinner for his large family, Stepan was excused from military service. In time, Stepan's daughters were able to help with the household chores, to look after the cow, pigs, and poultry, and were handy in the fields during the busy harvest time.

Gavryusha's sister, Kateryna, once she married, went to live with her husband's family. They were very poor, because the men in her husband's family were drunkards and sold their strip of land. Therefore, they didn't cultivate the land for themselves but were farmhands who worked for hire for the *barin*, as a landlord was called, and for other peasants.

Kateryna was sickly all her life and couldn't do the work required in a peasant family. She had only one daughter, Khrystina, nicknamed Khrystya. Kateryna stayed in bed for long periods of time, and her daughter Khrystya at a very early age had to start helping with household chores, garnering the hay and taking care of the few pigs and chickens they had. In her youth, Khrystya fell from a wagon while she was hauling hay. After her fall, she too was sick for a long time, and it left her barren. Daniyl and Anna helped their daughter, Kateryna, as much as they could, but because their son-in-law was a drunkard, they had to limit their help to foodstuff and to paying for doctors. If they gave her money, her husband spent it for samogon<sup>3</sup>.

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1. As recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky who heard it from her father Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy and from her grandmother Anna Berezhnaya.

2. Ham-shaped form, padded and stuffed with sawdust, used in tailoring to give shape to fronts of wool garments by pressing with hot iron, steam, and clapping with a wood clapper.

3. Moonshine.

## Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy

**As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

In 1886, when Gavryusha turned twenty-one, he was called to undergo a physical examination by the military medical commission, which found him healthy and fit to serve in the military service. He was officially registered as Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy and from his first day of military service was addressed by his military rank *snurovshchik* (rank for tailors and shoemakers) and last name, Berezhnoy. He was attached to the Fortieth Kolyvansky Infantry Regiment where he was assigned to the military tailor's unit. His skills were immediately recognized, and after a short period of training he began tailoring the officer's uniforms, greatcoats, and other special military outfits made of leather and fur.

In the military tailor's unit, Gavriyl Daniylovich had everyday contact with the officers as they came in the shop for fittings. By observing them he refined his manners, and his Russian became enriched with more sophisticated words and polished speech patterns.

For four years Gavriyl Daniylovich served in the Imperial Army and, in 1890, returned to Slavyansk as a First Class Senior Rank Noncombatant *snurovshchik* of the Fortieth Kolyvansky Infantry Regiment.

Immediately upon his return, he went to visit his former Master Gaydukov, who right away offered him a job as a master tailor. Being the best tailor in town, Gaydukov had too many customers to handle on his own. The town was growing, and new customers had to wait a long time for their orders to be completed. Gavriyl Daniylovich was very grateful to his former Master for the offer. But he told him, "During my four years in the military service I made up my mind that when I return home, I would start to work for myself and look for a bride. I decided that it's time for me to get married and to settle down."

Next, Gavriyl Daniylovich visited his father and mother in the village of Nikolskoye. He told them that he hadn't accepted the offer of his former Master and explained the reason to them. "I have learned my trade well, saved some money, and served in the military. Now it's the time for me to have my own tailor shop, find a nice girl who will be a good housewife, get married, and start a family."

"Yes, yes," his father answered. "But you should find a town girl, not a peasant girl," he suggested. "You need a woman who knows how to keep house in the manner of townsfolk and who will be able to look after the tailor shop and be presentable to the customers."

Just at that time Daniyl needed to drive into the neighboring town of Isyum to do business with the lumber merchant. Gavriyl Daniylovich decided to accompany his father to see how many tailors there were in that town. He thought he might open his tailor shop there. Daniyl told his son, "I know for some time the lumber salesman, and he knows this town well. Maybe he can tell you about the local tailors."

The lumber salesman, Fyodor losyfovich Grudzinsky, a short but lively Polish man, greeted Daniyl in a friendly manner.

"This is my son, Gavriyl Daniylovich," Daniyl introduced his son by his full name, as was customary for a respectable town dweller, "He has just come home after serving four years in the army," he explained. "Perhaps you can give us some advice, Fyodor losyfovich. You are very good with business matters, and you know this town so well."

Flattered, Fyodor losyfovich replied, "I would be glad to help you."

"He is a very skillful master tailor," Daniyl praised his son with great pride, "and he is looking for a good place to open his own tailor shop. He wants to find a good wife and settle down."

Daniyl, Gavriyl Daniylovich, and Fyodor losyfovich talked about the tailoring business in Slavyansk and in Ysyum. As Daniyl expected, Fyodor losyfovich was indeed a keen-witted man, as any good salesman should be. He didn't recommend opening a tailor shop in Isyum. Instead, he advised Gavriyl Daniylovich to open his shop in Slavyansk.

"Because," he said, "in Slavyansk many people know you." And he suggested, "Pay a visit to some of your old Master Gaydukov's customers, especially those that you remember who liked to bargain about the price. Offer them prices that are slightly lower than your old master's and promise them that they will not have to wait as long for their orders with you as they now wait with Master Gaydukov. You will see that you will get work right away."

Gavriyl Daniylovich liked Fyodor losyfovich's advice and he felt a great respect and trust for him instantly.

Fyodor losyfovich immediately evaluated Gavriyl Daniylovich from his point of

view, with his own interests at heart. He saw that Gavriyl Daniylovich was a good looking young man, that he had a profitable and secure trade, that he had already served in the army, and that he was seriously looking for a good wife. "It is as God himself had sent him!" thought Fyodor Iosyfovich, who had been searching for a good husband for his younger sister Natalia for some time. "It would be not a bad idea to arrange a matchmaking of Natalia to this young man." Fyodor Iosyfovich decided that he would first have a word with Gavriyl Daniylovich's father, Daniyl, to find out his opinion on the matter.

While Gavriyl Daniylovich went to look over the tailoring businesses in town, Fyodor Iosyfovich spoke to Daniyl about his idea. And it was mutually consented that Natalia could be an appropriate wife for Gavriyl Daniylovich, if they liked each other.

The two men agreed on arranging the matchmaking for the couple.

## The Matchmaking

**As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**

**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

Fyodor Iosyfovich Grudzinsky, as a son, had many responsibilities to his family. When his father went blind and deaf due to old age, Fyodor had to take care of his parents and his younger sister Natalia.

Before he went blind, Fyodor's father, Iosif Grudzinsky, had raised his family by operating a small mercantile store with a selection of all kinds of merchandise for the peasants in the small village. He settled in the village of Stepanovka near the town of Ysyum after moving with his family from Poland, where they had lived in the city of Warsaw in the borough of Praha.

Although they spoke Russian quite well, Iosif and his wife continued to speak to each other mostly in Polish. However, all four of his children spoke only Russian.

Their oldest daughter, Yekatyerina, married very young to a Polish man by the name of Domogadsky and lived in Slavyansk where he was employed as a salesman. Their oldest son, Gregory, had found a job as a coal miner and moved away from the family, got married and already had two sons. At that time their youngest son, Fyodor, and their youngest daughter, Natalia, lived with them and helped in the shop. When Fyodor got married, he found employment as a salesman with the lumber merchant in Ysyum and moved there with his wife, Lyuba. They had only two children, a daughter, Yekatyerina, named after his sister, and nicknamed Katya, and a son Iosif.

When his father went blind, Fyodor brought his parents to live with him and his wife in Ysyum. He placed his sister Natalia as a housemaid with the family of the same lumber merchant for whom he was working. Although Natalia had a decent job looking after the children and was well treated by the family, her brother, Fyodor still felt responsible for his sister. When Fyodor Iosyfovich met Gavriyl Daniylovich and evaluated him as an eligible young man, he decided that this match was the perfect opportunity for his sister Natalia to get married, have her own family and raise her own

children. After he spoke about it to Gavriyl Daniylovich's father Daniyl, they agreed to arrange a matchmaking for the couple sometime soon at the home of Natalia's sister who lived in Slavyansk.

Their introduction took place during Christmas holidays, when Natalia came to visit her sister Yekatyerina for a few days. Her husband, Domogadsky, as a salesman had a chance to get acquainted with Gavriyl Daniylovich before holidays and to form a positive opinion about him as a potential brother-in-law. Then, during the Christmas holidays he invited him one evening to visit at his home, and on that occasion introduced him to his sister-in-law, Natalia Iosyfovna Grudzinskaya.

It was not hard for Natalia Iosyfovna to win the heart of Gavriyl Daniylovich. She was a pleasant young woman of medium height, slender, fresh and neat, having donned her best holiday dress. Her straight, light brown hair was softly combed back and plaited in a braid that was rolled into a bun and secured with hairpins low on the back of her head. Her high forehead was a prominent feature of a fair-skinned, smoothly rounded face. Narrow eyebrows softly outlined her green-flecked gray eyes. She held her head at a slightly upward tilt, which made her small nose, chin, and narrow, gently compressed lips more noticeable. She had gentle manners and was soft-spoken.

Natalia Iosyfovna had heard all about Gavriyl Daniylovich's positive traits from her brother and from her brother-in-law, Domogadsky. Slavyansk was a small provincial town where most of the inhabitants knew each other. And, although Gavriyl Daniylovich was not wealthy, it was well known that he was a master of his trade; that he lived within his means; that he attended church every Sunday; and that he didn't have any vices. Therefore, he was considered a good marriage prospect for Natalia.

During the four years that he served in the army, Gavriyl Daniylovich had matured considerably. A full head of wavy dark brown hair, moustache, and neatly trimmed shovel-shaped beard framed his tanned face. His straight nose divided his face in half from his large forehead down to his mustache, and his thick, dark eyebrows made his brown eyes look bigger. His new, well-fitting suit that he made for himself before coming home from the army made him look like a picture out of the latest fashion journal. Living in town from a young age, he had learned the manners of a town dweller. And, during his years in the service when he tailored for the officers, he had observed and learned from them a gentleman's manners, refined words and expressions.

Both Daniyl and Natalia were ready for marriage. Therefore, after a short courtship, they decided not to wait long to marry. The wedding was in Ysyum, without fanfare, but everything was done according to all Russian Orthodox Church rituals as both Gavriyl Daniylovich and Natalia Iosifovna were devoted Christians. The newlyweds settled down in Slavyansk in the Gavriyl Daniylovich's old neighborhood, on Kharkovsky Street, where he rented a small two-bedroom house not far from his old master's home.

He bought a second-hand Singer treadle sewing machine and a large table that he put in the kitchen. On the table he placed a brand new charcoal iron, a pressing pad, a few pressing cloths, and a yardstick. He already owned a large pincushion and a pair of big tailoring scissors that he had used when he worked for Master Gaidukov. He bought several spools of thread in basic colors, pins and needles, chalk, pencils, and a small notebook in which to write down his customers' measurements. Around his neck he hung, for luck, his old tape measure—even though he could afford to buy a new one. And, voilà, he was in the tailoring business!

Gavriyl Daniylovich followed his brother-in-law's advice about how to get his first customers and kept his prices slightly lower than his former master's. Gaidukov gave him some work, too, when he had many rush orders on his hands. Therefore, right from the start, Gavriyl Daniylovich could well provide for his wife, and soon bought the furniture and things they needed to start a household.

Beginning with their first year of marriage, they were blessed with children. Almost every year thereafter, Natalia had a child. In 1892 their first son, Vasyly, was born.. Sadly, he died of diphtheria when he was in the second preparatory class. In 1893 their second son, Nikolay, was born, and they called him Kolya for short, as was common in Russian for this name. The year after, in 1894, their oldest daughter, Tatyana, was born, and they called her Tanya for short.

The family was growing, and so was Gavriyl Daniylovich's business. He took on several apprentices to help him and began to save money to buy a house. He bought it just in time to celebrate both the housewarming and the birth of his second daughter, Antonina, who was born on February 23, 1895. As was usual for this name, they called her Tonya for short.

The house was on the Kharkovsky Street, not far from where they had lived before. It had five rooms, and Gavriyl Daniylovich could finally have a separate room for his tailor shop.

In 1896, their third daughter, Anna, was born, and they nicknamed her Nyusya. In 1897, their third son, Alexander, was born, and they called him, as was customary for that name, Shura. The next year, in 1898, their fourth son, Ivan was born, and was nicknamed Vanya. In 1899, their fourth daughter, Olga, was born, and she was called Olya for short. After that, for several years they did not have any more children, not until Gavriyl Daniylovich returned from the war against Japan in 1905. Then, their fifth daughter, Natalia, was born, and she was called for short, Natasha. She was sick from birth and died the same year. In 1912 their last child, the fifth and youngest son, Pyetr, was born, and they called him, Pyetya.

With all those children Natalia Iosyfovna needed help and they hired first one servant and later another. One took care of the children and the other did general housework and helped Natalia Iosyfovna in the kitchen.

Meanwhile, Gavriyl Daniylovich was building up his clientele very quickly and also needed help in the tailor shop. He took on more apprentices to help him; soon, he hired a senior apprentice. Still, he had to work late on some days to finish customers' orders, especially before the holidays.

Gavriyl Daniylovich and Natalia Iosyfovna didn't have much time for leisure, they were always busy. He took care of the tailor shop business by attending to customers and tailoring their outfits; she took care of the family matters by running smoothly the household and looking after their children. He was a good breadwinner and she was a thrifty housewife. They were not rich, but their large family was well provided for and taken care of. They were content with their life, one that was common in those days to a lower middle class family in a small provincial town in Russia.

# Golden Childhood

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

I find a festive occasion in the midst of humdrum life,  
To knit my verses, like laces, from the memory's yarn.  
Longing for the past leads me into a melancholy mood.  
Like a streak of lightning flashed by my golden childhood  
And disappeared in stormy clouds of time past.  
A swarm of memories is whirling in my meditating mind  
And I remember that as small children we, myself and Nyusya,  
My fair-haired younger sister, slept together on one bed.  
And, in the summer, when she was five and I was six,  
We chased each other in the garden playing hide-and-seek,  
Or catching fluttering around us playful butterflies;  
Or lying on the garden grass as we looked up into blue sky  
And watched a lonely fluffy cloudlet drifting by.  
It made us feel like we were floating together alongside it.  
Suddenly, the white cloudlet broke up, dissolved and disappeared.  
It seemed like it was playing our game of hide-and-seek.  
We ran around bushes and looked in the gazebo, to no avail.  
We couldn't find it. Alas! It disappeared without a trace.  
Near the lilac bushes our mother cooked Cherry preserves,  
and skimmed onto a plate a white, sugary foam.  
We dipped our fingers in it to taste the sweet, sticky stuff.  
Our mother shook her finger warning us:  
"It is enough! Go! Go away!  
You'd better try to find some other place to play."  
We ran on the green lawn and,  
Holding each other's hands,  
Began to whirl round and round  
Until we fell onto the ground  
And saw again in the deep blue sky  
A cloudlet that had drifted by.  
After so many years gone by  
It's hard to find the words  
To tell about the events  
That happened during my long lifetime,  
All the hardships endured.  
Much has forever been forgotten.  
But my golden childhood,  
Though like lightning flashed by,  
Remained in my memory as deep and clear  
As the blue sky.

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Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "*Dyetstvo zolotoye*" [in Russian] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1981),  
trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1989. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

# A Petition To The Czar

As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

I remember very vividly an event that happened when I was about nine years old, in the beginning of 1904. At that time the Russian-Japanese War started and my father was called to serve in the army. He had to hurriedly finish all his customers' orders and depart quickly to join his military outfit.

Without my father's earnings, my mother had no choice but to dismiss the two servants who helped her with the household and her seven children. My paternal grandmother, Anna, came from the village Nikolskoye to stay with us and to help her with the children. And my mother's sister, Yekatyerina Iosifovna Grudzinsky Domogadsky (we all called her Aunt Katya) and her young daughter, our cousin, Alexandra whose nickname was Sasha, moved in with us and helped with the washing, ironing, mending and sewing. Aunt Katya recently lost her husband to tuberculosis, and having exhausted all their savings during the last years of her husband's illness, had a hard time making ends meet.

My mother was very distressed that my father had to leave his home and family to go to the Far East to fight against Japan. As soon as he departed, Mother visited many important people in town seeking their counsel. On their advice, she submitted a petition to the Czar appealing for her husband's release from military duties as the sole breadwinner of a large family with seven children.

In order to state her case more strongly, she decided to include a photograph of the whole family. Having our picture taken was a big event for the whole family. My mother brought all of us seven children and our grandmother, Anna, to the photographer. All of us were neatly dressed in our best clothes. This photo<sup>1</sup> of the whole family without my father, and another taken later with my father, were preserved with care as family heirlooms. I saw them so many times that I still remember many of the details in them.

The photographer carefully arranged us in a pose. In the front row sat my grandmother, dressed in a flowered print peasant blouse and gathered skirt. She held my younger sister, Olga, in her lap. My mother wore her Sunday dress with a front panel of a dress, called plastron, decorated with pin-tucks. She sat rigidly straight with her hand on the shoulder of my younger brother, Vanya, who stood in front of her. Next to him and close to my grandmother, sat my brother Shura. Both Vanya and Shura were dressed in their Boy's Elementary School uniforms.

I stood next to my mother with my elbow on her shoulder and my mouth open in expectation of something happening. No wonder, the photographer had told us, "Be still, don't move, and look right into the camera and you will see a bird fly out of it." My sister Nyusya stood next to me, and my older sister, Tanya, stood next to Grandmother with her hand on her shoulder. All three of us, Nyusya, Tanya, and I, were dressed in our Red Women's Gymnasium uniforms—a wine-colored dress and a white apron with a bib that was worn only on Sundays and to church, instead of the black apron and bib worn on weekdays. We wore narrow-toed, high black shoes with two elastic straps on the sides that were used to pull them on. In the center of the photograph, next to my mother,

stood my older brother, Kolya, with his hand on Mother's shoulder. He wore his Men's Gymnasium uniform with its stand-up collar.

After the photograph and the petition to the Czar were mailed we all anxiously waited, wondering when my father would be allowed to come home. But it was not to be. The town's authorities notified my mother that her husband could not be released from service. Instead, the Crown granted assistance to her seven children. She received a monthly subsidy designated for large families of soldiers who served in that war. Additionally, they told her that the town would provide free tuition, books, school uniforms, and shoes for all of her children.

At that time we lived in the first small house that my father had bought before I was born. The house had two rooms for the children; in one, all the girls slept, and in the other, all the boys slept. Each child had his own bed. A hall divided the children's rooms from a great room, which served as a parlor and dining room during the day. At the far end of this room, opposite the door, stood my parents' large bed. The room was also their bedroom at night.

In the front part of the room beside a window was a dining table and chairs, and in the corner a gilded icon of the Savior hung. The top and sides of the icon were draped with a long cross-stitched linen scarf, called *rushnik* in Ukrainian. In front of the icon, hanging from the ceiling on a long chain was an oil icon-lamp, which was lit on Sundays and holidays. Under the icon was a small corner table where my parents kept their volumes of the family Bible and The New Testament. On this table were also placed the traditional Easter and Christmas foods, once they were blessed by the Parson. Placed in the center of the room were couple of upholstered chairs and a sofa and against the wall stood a brand new piano, bought for us girls to exercise our piano lessons given in our schools. At the end of the hall was a big kitchen with a large brick stove, a big kitchen table, and a narrow bed for the servants. An arched doorway divided the kitchen from what was originally intended to be the dining room, now my father's tailor shop.

During the time our father was at war, my aunt Katya slept with my mother in her bed. Her daughter, Sasha, who was older than any of us girls, slept on the servant's bed in the kitchen. And my grandmother, Anna, to whom I was more attached than any of my sisters, slept with me in my bed, as she used to always do when she came to visit us from her village. I liked to cuddle in bed close to my grandmother and felt special, because she preferred to sleep with me and not with any of my sisters. This time, I missed very much my father who every night used to come in our room, bless us, and kiss on the cheek or on the forehead. Sleeping close to my grandmother, I felt secure and protected.

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1. The 1904 Berezhnoy's family photograph, private collection of Yelena Zinov'yevna Naygovzina Avakyan, granddaughter of Tatyana Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Tatarskaya. She gave a copy of this photo as a gift to Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky for her hundredth birthday, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

# The Contagious Disease Trachoma

As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

When my grandmother Anna came to stay with us after my father went to war against Japan, her eyelids were red and swollen and she was constantly drying her tears. Nobody paid much attention to this, since her eyelids were often irritated from working in the fields. But this time it was different; she had an infection in her eyes that would not heal. She slept with me in my bed and I caught from her the contagious disease, trachoma. And sadly, it was not diagnosed right away.

It was a long and insidious disease. At its onset, my mother kept me in a dark room during the day, hoping that the infection would go away by itself. Grandmother Anna stayed with me and entertained me with folk tales. But my eyes were not improving, and so my mother took me to the local doctor. His name was Arkhangel'sky, and he worked during the day at a hospital and gave me treatments when he got home in the late afternoon. I used to wait for him on the steps of his house, dreading his return because he treated the infected tissue on the inside of my eyelids with a *lapis*<sup>1</sup> that burned my eyes. His prognosis for my recovery was grim; he told my mother that I would eventually go blind.

My mother always became grief-stricken by any of her children's illnesses; she was nervous, looked sad, cried a lot, and would try by any means or sources to find help for the sick child. Therefore, when she heard that I would lose my eyesight, she decided to take me to a well-known Jewish eye doctor by the name of Hirshman. To see him, we had to travel by train to the city of Kharkov. After examining me thoroughly, he said that, indeed, I would become completely blind, because the treatment with the *lapis* had burned the corneas of my eyes and, as I grew up, the scars on them would grow larger and obscure my vision. He told my mother to rinse my eyes with a boric acid solution, but he didn't give any medication for infection.

Once my mother heard confirmation of the prognosis already given her by our local doctor, she would not find peace until she had exhausted all means to help me. Being a very religious woman, she prayed fervently, placing candles in the church, and she also prayed with me at home every night before I went to bed, both of us kneeling in front of the icon.

Then in the summer, she decided to seek further help for my recovery from the miraculous icon of the Holy Mother of God, *Neopalimaya Kupina*.<sup>2</sup> This icon was considered to be miraculous because during a fire that burned the whole monastery to the ground it was the only icon that had remained undamaged.

Once a year the miraculous icon was brought from the old monastery situated in the Svyatyye Gory<sup>3</sup> to Slavyansk for the Yearly Procession. Along the sidewalks of Kharkovsky Street, every household placed near their gate a small table covered with a white tablecloth. On the table were arranged a loaf of bread, a pitcher of water, and burning candles; and in the house, in front of the icon, the oil icon-lamp was lit.

The *Batyushka*, as the clergyman was called, would stop at each table, give his blessings over the bread and water and collect donations for the monastery. The water was then preserved during the year as holy water and was used to sprinkle sick

members of the family. Those who wished for special grace would ask *Batyushka* to come into the house to pray and would give him a generous donation.

That summer my mother invited *Batyushka* into our home; she knelt herself and told me to kneel in front of the icon, too. As the *Batyushka* recited a prayer we repeated it after him, asking *Neopalimaya Kupina* for the miracle of healing my eyes.

Shortly after that, some friends told my mother that a woman eye doctor had come for the summer to a clinic at the Slavyansk Kurort at the subdivision of our town near Salty Lake. It was a renowned health resort where many people from all parts of Russia came each summer. There was a clinic where well-known doctors practiced in the summer, and a sanitarium, where heated salt water, called *rapa*, and mud from Salty Lake were used for therapy.

There was also a park with flowerbeds, small fountains, and many benches scattered throughout, and an outdoor stage, where an orchestra played in the evening. Next to the park was a pine forest where visitors could hang their hammocks and rest in the shade while breathing the fresh resinous air. Around the lake, close to the pine forest there were many cottages available for rent to out-of-town visitors.

We went to see the woman doctor. I stayed at the clinic for three weeks. Like the other patients, I received general treatment, such as nourishing meals, and baths in warm salt water from Salty Lake. The woman doctor treated my eyes with some medicated ointment until the infection was gone. I began to see better, but the doctor told us that damage that had already been done to my eyes would leave permanent scars and I would need to wear eyeglasses for the rest of my life. I came home wearing my first pair of glasses, which helped me to read and see at short distances, but at longer distances everything blurred and went out of focus.

My mother was just happy that the infection was gone and that the glasses allowed me to read. She told me, "*Tonyechka*<sup>4</sup>, my clever girl, the most important thing is that now you can read and learn, and continue to have good grades in school."

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1. A medication in a stick form, which was used at that time to burn out the infected tissue on the eyelids.

2. The Unsinged Icon.

3. The Holy Mountains, not far from Slavyansk, where a monastery was rebuilt for miraculous icon sanctuary.

4. Endearing of Tonya.

## My Little Sister Natasha

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

During my father's absence my mother was frugal with the subsidy she received from the government. When the war against Japan ended abruptly due to the defeat of

the Russian fleet, the men began to return home by rail.

The local railroad branch called *Vyetka* connected the three major subdivisions of Slavyansk: Slavyansk Station, Slavyansk Town, and Slavyansk Kurort. The families of the returning men gathered at every local station to wait for the train, hoping to greet their returning fathers, sons, and brothers. On the corner of Railroad and Kharkovsky Streets, Bankovskaya station was located next to the town's only bank. For several days our whole family waited there whenever *Vyetka* was due to stop. One day as all of us were looking in the direction of the oncoming train, we suddenly heard a faint voice coming from a horse driven cart with several men on it, "Natalia... Tanya... Tonya..." And as the cart came closer, we all rushed in surprise to embrace my father. He told us that some of the men didn't have the patience to wait for the *Vyetka* train and had hired a cart to bring them home sooner.

After embracing my father, my mother immediately presented him proudly with an unexpected gift. It was a bank savings account book listing all the amounts of money she had saved from the government subsidy that she received while he was at war.

Since my father and mother agreed that our aunt Katya and her daughter, Sasha, should remain to live with us, my father decided to build a larger house. He took out a bank loan that was guaranteed by some of his richest clients. With it he had built on our lot an one story, white brick house, right next to the old one. Just as the house was finished in 1905, my youngest sister, Natalia, was born and we called her Natasha.

One episode remained vivid in my mind about my youngest sister Natasha, who was always sickly from birth and had some kind of congenital abnormality. All of us girls helped our mother take care of her. We all loved our little sister and played with her as if she was our doll, holding her in our arms, teaching her to talk and walk, things she never mastered.

My mother tried to find help for Natasha from the doctors, but they could not help her. When it came to the illnesses of her children, my mother didn't limit herself to doctors and to popular folk remedies, but complemented them with fervent prayers, candle burning at home and in the church, and, if nothing else would help, she did not hesitate to call in folk healers to help.

When candles and prayers did not help, and Natasha's health took a turn for the worse, my mother became desperate in her search to save her baby. One day she heard about an old woman who had healing powers and invited her into our house. We all gathered around her to watch the treatment. The old woman took Natasha in her arms and, constantly crossing herself and our baby sister, muttered some prayers for a while. Then suddenly she rushed out onto the porch, lifted Natasha high in the air and started to shake her vigorously. Natasha gave a piercing cry and we all got scared; I screamed and my sisters began to cry. The old woman pushed the scared, crying baby into my mother's arms, telling her that her healing treatment was complete and that Natasha's health should improve soon. She swiftly grabbed her fee from my mother's hand and hurried towards the gate.

My mother gently lulled and calmed Natasha down, while all of us stood around her expecting to see an immediate improvement in her condition. But we were greatly disappointed and sad, because Natasha died a few days later. My mother was in great grief after losing her baby, but my father consoled her: "All of us loved our little

Natasha and made her short life on this earth as happy as we could. But we should be thankful to merciful God who didn't allow her to suffer too long and took her to haven."

## The Thunderstorms

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Another impression of my childhood that had a life-long effect on me was due to my mother's obsessive fear of thunderstorms and her behavior as she warned us children about them. As soon as lightning would start far off on the horizon and thunder could barely be heard, she would anxiously summon all us children into the house and order us, "Stay far away from the windows! Hurry! Come here! Get on your knees under the icon and pray with me!" She would pray with such a frightened voice that we would feel threatened by the approaching lightning flashes and thunder rumblings, and we would sincerely join her in praying.

One day a thunderstorm caught my sister Nyusya and me when we played with our neighbor's girls. We were on the second floor of their apartment in the house across the street from ours. Their father, a doctor, who was at home when the storm began, went right away to the glass-covered veranda. "Come, come, girls!" he called all of us, "Come to admire the nature's most spectacular show!"

His daughters joyously followed their father while Nyusya and I were hiding inside the room as far from the windows as we could.

"Come, come, girls! There is nothing to be afraid of," our neighbor tried to calm us.

"Stupid little girls!" our friends laughed and teased us from the veranda.

"Look at us, we are not afraid!"

"Our mother tells us to stay away from the windows," I promptly justified our behavior.

And Nysya added, "We obey our mother."

We were afraid, confused, and ashamed, all at once, but the fear was stronger than being laughed at, and we stayed inside until the storm passed. Our friends teased us for a long time after this incident, but we always had the same answer, "We obey our mother."

"Where have you been?" anxiously asked our mother when we got home.

"At our neighbor's house," we answered.

"Did you remember to stay away from the windows and have you prayed?"

"Ye-es..." I answered, "But we forgot to pray."

Another very memorable incident involving the thunderstorm occurred during one of our summer vacations. Every year at the end of the summer we used to visit our paternal grandparents in the village of Nikolskoye. It happened during one of our visits when the four of us, Kolya, Tanya, Nyusya, and I were there. It was in August, when thunderstorms are common in the Ukraine. At that time, all the melons and

watermelons were ready to be picked. Our grandparents took them to the market in Slavyansk every Sunday.

That summer upon his return from the market Dyedushka Daniyl, as we called our grandfather, came to our house and took us with him to stay in the village for a week. My mother had prepared each of us a small bundle containing a change of clothes. We used them to sit on in the wagon, so we would have a smoother ride over the unpaved, bumpy country road.

During the day we stayed with Babushka Anna, as we called our grandmother, in a large straw hut that stood at the crest of the hilltop where the melon field descended toward the river. It was well built, and so it was dry even when it rained. We also slept there at night on straw padding without any blankets because the August nights were very hot.

We helped to collect the ripe watermelons and melons. We put them in a big pile near the hut and then covered them with a layer of straw. It was a lot of fun. We liked to find a very big watermelon and sit on it, pretending it was a horse. If we found a cracked one, we would break it into big pieces and eat it right on the spot, letting the sweet juice trickle down our hands, arms, and faces.

Babushka brought bread, lard, and salt from home. With vegetables from the garden that was just down the hill near the riverbank, she cooked a soup for us in a black cast-iron kettle over a straw fire outside the hut. We would all eat the soup with the wooden spoons right out of the kettle; take a bite of lard, then a bite of bread and a spoonful of soup, and then a bite of freshly picked cucumber or tomato. For dessert we would have a ripe, sweet-smelling melon or juicy watermelon.

I was always curious, wondering how those big watermelons could grow from such a small plant. Babushka would answer, "That's how God makes them. You see how calloused my hands are? God is rewarding us for our hard work.."

But Dyedushka explained it even better. He would take a handful of earth and tell me, "Take this soil in your hands. Don't be afraid; it is our Mother Earth. Look how black it is; it's a good, rich soil. With land like this we will never go hungry. We work hard to make this land fertile, and the land rewards us with plentiful crops."

Then I was wondering how this black soil could make such red and yellow sweet tasting fruits. But no one could give me an answer to this question. My grandfather would only comment to my grandmother, "This one is as curious as our Gavryusha was."

On Saturday my brother Kolya, who loved to be around the horses, would harness them and drive the wagon up close to the melon field, stopping it on the road. We would all bring melons and watermelons across the field one by one to the road where Dyedushka would load them onto the *harba*<sup>1</sup>, a high wagon made from the wooden planks. It had to be loaded and ready to go on the road to Slavyansk very early on Sunday morning, when it was still dark, in order for Dyedushka to get to the market on time. We would ride on top of the watermelons and sleep most of the way.

On that particular Saturday evening, Tanya and Kolya went with Dyedushka on the loaded *harba* to the village and Nyusya and I stayed at the straw hut to sleep with Babushka. We were sitting near the hut on the top of the hill almost ready to retire for the night and Babushka was doing something nearby.

Suddenly, huge black clouds covered up the sky and almost touched the hut's pointed roof. We saw Babushka running toward us, screaming, "Quick! Quick! A

thunderstorm is coming!" She grabbed both of us by our hands and started to run away from the hilltop toward the village. "Hurry, hurry!" she prompted us. "We have to run to the nearest cottage." Before we reached the cottage a violent storm began, and lightning kept striking the hilltop. The thunder was so loud that it felt as though we were right in the middle of it. We were terrified.

As we entered the first cottage we came to, the woman there met us with both fear and relief in her eyes. She exclaimed, "Thank God, you got out on time! I thought that all of you were hiding inside the hut and that you were burning along with it. Did you see? It was a straight hit! Look, see how it burns!" We watched from her cottage windows as flames engulfed the straw structure. It quickly disappeared, leaving only smoke rising from that spot. Frightened and clinging to Babushka, we spent the night in the peasant's cottage.

The next morning we had a late start. Dyedushka wanted to see the site and show it to my brother and sister and me. Only the gray ashes, still wet from the downpour, remained; the hut and all that was in it had burned to the ground. We were able to salvage only the black cast-iron kettle that had been left outside.

When we got home and told our mother what had happened, she got very upset, but, at the same time she was very happy and was able only to repeat over and over, "Didn't I teach you to hide from the lightning? God himself gave the presence of mind to Babushka to get you out of that hut! It makes me shiver to think that all of you could have perished in that fire!"

This incident reinforced my fear of thunderstorms and convinced me that my mother was right to be afraid of them. For the rest of my life I couldn't overcome my fear and as soon as I would hear thunder or see lightning far off on the horizon, I would hide in a safe place away from windows and sometimes pray.

## My Parents Were Devoted Christians

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Both my father and mother were very devoted Christians. They belonged to the Russian Orthodox faith, called in Russian *Pravoslavny* faith, which was a State Religion. My father was a member of the Church Council of the *Sobor*, a cathedral that stood on the central Soborny Square. All the family attended Church services every Sunday. And when celebrating religious holidays, my mother strictly adhered to all *Pravoslavny* traditions. From early childhood, my mother taught us children to pray and expected us to say our prayers before going to bed.

My father liked to read the Bible in the evenings, but he read very slowly. To understand it better, he often asked us children to read to him aloud from the Bible. I was deeply impressed with my father's unshaken faith in God and in the Holy Scriptures. When I read them to him, he always tried to find passages predicting the future. I could never figure out what all those writings meant and always wondered how my father

could understand them so well, how he could decipher from an old book something that might happen in the future.

When Germany and Russia were at war in 1914 during World War I, my father was eager to get firsthand news, so he began to buy the newspaper and read it aloud by putting syllables together slowly and pronouncing the words. Later, at the first signs of the Revolution he told me, "Now, you can see it was all predicted in the Bible." I couldn't see it even then.

My father was also really good at arithmetic and always helped us with our homework. He helped me solve the problems through reasoning. But when he helped my sister Nyusya, she found it easier to ask him to calculate and give her the results rather than do it herself.

My mother's education did not extend beyond elementary school and, although she was literate, as a devoted Christian she read only the New Testament and the Bible. We did not have any other books in our home, except for our school textbooks. However, my father and my mother both considered education to be important for us children and we were all expected to study hard and continue our education beyond gymnasium, as secondary school was called, in order to specialize in our chosen field of occupation.

My father never interfered with how and what my mother taught us children, for he believed that his wife was a good mother and could teach us right behavior and manners. But he also taught and disciplined us when he was not busy with his tailoring tasks or with his customers.

Although my mother believed in God and in the power of prayer, she also believed in all the folk superstitions, prejudices, bad omens and good signs. She believed that the interpretation of dreams could predict events to come in her life and consulted with her friends on that matter. She also trusted the cards to predict future events and when something was bothering her she asked my grandmother Anna to see what was in the cards for her. I liked to watch my grandmother spreading the cards out on the table and wondered how she could tell from looking at them what would happen to somebody. Although my grandmother didn't know how to read and write, she knew the language of card-reading well. Listening to her, I was convinced that she was very smart.

My mother also believed strongly in all folk remedies and practiced them on us children and on herself. The cough was cured with warm milk and honey; the bad chest cold was cured by applying heated cupping-glasses, or so called suction cups, to the front and back of the chest. Sore throat was cured by applying around the neck compresses of linen cloth soaked in alcohol, then covered with a piece of wax paper, an abundant layer of fluffy cotton, and finally a piece of wool cloth.

At the first sign of any childhood disease, children were isolated in a dark room to speed up the course of the illness. Cuts and skin infections were covered with a split leaf of aloe vera plant that was grown for that purpose in the house. The fever was reduced by placing a cold-water compress on the forehead. And I remember that my mother very often had bad headaches and her preferred remedy was to lie down, place a cloth soaked in cold water and vinegar on her forehead, and send one of us to get her friend who would sit next to her and tell her all the current gossip until she fell asleep.

# The Easter Holidays

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

My mother, as a devoted Christian, adhered to all religious Russian Orthodox holiday rituals and also followed strictly all the folk customs and traditional and seasonal festive ceremonies. I vividly remember some of them, especially the most important—Easter and Christmas.

Long before the Easter and Christmas holidays, my mother would begin sewing new clothes for all her children. She would go to the fabric merchant, the one my father recommended all of his customers buy cloth for their orders from, because he had the best quality fabrics. She would buy at discount prices many yards of the same fabric for all the girls' dresses and petticoats, and for all the boys' shirts. Then she would hire a seamstress to sew in our home for a week or more, because it was cheaper than paying her for making each item. My father would sew all new suits for his growing sons. Then my mother would buy for us girls new straw hats with bows that matched our Easter dresses or felt hats for Christmas. The year my father was at war with Japan, she still managed to dress us up in new clothes for the holidays.

The two weeks before Easter were a very busy time for my mother. She cleaned the whole house thoroughly: she scrubbed all floors, windows, and doors, and also washed, starched, and ironed all curtains. That week she hired two women in addition to our two regular servants to help her to do all those chores.

Then there was a cleansing ceremony on Holy Thursday of the Holy Week before Easter. My mother used to bathe all of us children early in the morning before sunrise. It was really not considered a bath, but rather a holy cleansing before Easter. When we were little, my father would come to our room, gently wake us up, take two girls in his arms and bring us into the kitchen where my mother had filled with warm water a wooden *koryto*, an oblong wooden trough that was used for bathing and for doing laundry. Then she would bathe us, two at a time. We all were bathed in the same water that was not changed; hot water was simply added to what was in the trough to warm it before the other children were bathed.

A linen sheet decorated with lace was used to dry us after our bath. This sheet was used only for special occasions and was also used for christening all the children in the family. It was dried out in front of the hot open oven while we bathed. After our bath, my father would take us in his arms and gently put us back to bed, covering us carefully with the blanket all the way over our ears.

On Palm Sunday we all went to the church with branches of pussy willow that symbolized in the Russian Orthodox tradition the palm leaves that did not grow in our part of the country. The clergyman would sprinkle holy water on the branches, and we would put the branches in every room of the house.

It is a Russian and Ukrainian tradition to have for Easter two kinds of special desserts called *paskha*.<sup>1</sup> They were my mother's specialties. One was tall, cylinder-shaped sweet bread called *kulich* with candied fruit and raisins, and the other was a cottage cheese *paskha*.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the special *paskhas* for their families, all the

women would bake several extra small sweetbread *paskhas* and decorate half a dozen extra eggs to donate to the *Batyushka* during the blessing ceremony in the churchyard.

A few days before Easter, we children loved to help my mother decorate Easter eggs. After the eggs were boiled and cooled, we would place them in a decoction prepared ahead of time by my mother from various parts of fruits and vegetables. By dipping the eggs in a strong tea, it would give them a light brown color; in the juice of boiled beetroot—in a wine color; in a liquid from boiled onion skins—a light yellow; in the juice of preserved cherries—red; in a solution of bluing powder for the laundry—blue; and by adding a small amount of bluing powder to a boiled onionskins liquid—green.

On the Saturday before Easter the blessing ceremony was held in the churchyard. All the women brought their baskets of Easter eggs and baked sweet *kulich* wrapped in a large, white, square kerchief or a small tablecloth tied at the four corners. They would line up in neat rows, put the packages on the ground, untie the kerchiefs, and wait for the clergyman to come and sprinkle holy water on the goods and give his blessings. The Altar boys followed after the clergyman with big baskets in which to collect from each woman her donated eggs and *kulich*.

Arriving home, my mother would place the basket of blessed eggs and *kulich* in the dining room on the corner table below the icon and light the icon-lamp hanging over it. The eggs and *kulich* were left there until Easter dinner was served.

On Easter Sunday, all the people from town and the nearby vicinities would come to *Sobor*, the town's cathedral, for a big, solemn service. Whole families would walk slowly down the streets and across Soborny Square. Most people knew each other in our small town. The family would stop and salute each other ceremoniously with the traditional Orthodox Easter greeting,

*"Khristos voskryesye!"* ("The Christ has risen!")

*"Vo istinu voskryesye!"* ("Indeed, He has risen!") all would answer.

Usually the Easter weather was warm and everyone would parade around in his or her festive clothes. Women and girls proudly displayed their fluffy dresses and turned their heads right and left to make the ribbons on their straw hats float in the air. Men and boys, dressed in their best suits, white shirts and bow ties would carry themselves in a dignified manner. And the boys would even refrain from the urge to pull on the girls' floating ribbons.

The Easter ceremony was solemn and beautiful. The Cathedral was brightly illuminated with candles, and the golden decorations on the icons as well as the clergymen's festive ceremonial robes and implements sparkled and multiplied in each other reflections. The soft streams of bluish smoke arose from the incense lamps that were swung in slow motion by the clergymen. Smoke slowly dissolved and drifted everywhere filling the air with the sweet fragrance of the burning incense. The choir sang beautiful Easter hymns. All listened to the clergyman's droning chanting prayers in the Old Church Slavonic language that enveloped everyone in the mystical experience of the sacred religious rites. Exiting the church, the people smiled and were friendly to each other, as if the Easter ceremony had lifted their spirits and erased their worries. Everyone went home in this elevated, festive mood.

For Easter dinner my mother would roast either a whole piglet or a half lamb and put it on a special oblong tray in the middle of the table. It was served with fried or mashed potatoes and sautéed pickled cabbage. Around it would be placed all kinds of

delicacies purchased from the Taganessov's Delicatessen: smoked fish, sardines, sprats, black and red caviar, and a variety of cheeses.

Before starting the festive dinner, our father would say a prayer and solemnly pronounce, "*Khristos voskryesye!*" And we all together would answer, "*Vo istinu voskryesye!*" Then my mother would pass around the basket of blessed Easter eggs and each of us would start by eating a colored egg. Only then would we begin with dinner. The dinner would be completed with generous portions of *kulich* and cheese *paskha* that we children eagerly waited to be served.

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1. Easter bread or cake.

2. Creamy cheesecake made entirely from fresh creamed cottage cheese, sour cream, sugar, egg yokes, candied fruits, raisins, nuts, and flavored with vanilla. It was shaped in a tall cylinder form, cooled in the cellar and then decorated all over with colorful candied fruits.

## Christmas

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

I remember my childhood Christmas.  
Snowdrifts are all around  
Caroling is heard near the door.  
Boiled wheat grain and compote are served,  
The whole family is already at the table.  
Father, crossing himself,  
Invites everybody to the Holy Supper.  
Solemn stillness wraps the room.  
Then my grandmother begins a tale,  
Deeply imprinted in my heart,  
About the night the Christ was born.  
The angels sing glory to the Newborn,  
The wise men hurry with gifts to Bethlehem.  
I fell asleep with wonderful dreams.  
In the morning, early-early,  
Mother wakes me up,  
"Get up, my child, hurry up,  
They are already here,  
The boys with the star to  
Glorify this Christmas.  
And Santa Claus has brought  
Our Christmas tree to us."  
I run and - Ah!

The door in living room is open wide,  
The Christmas tree is standing there  
And on top the star is shining.  
The boys' choir sings in harmony  
And Santa presents gifts to all.  
What a great joy Christmas is!  
The triumph of eternal peace.<sup>1</sup>

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Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Rozhdestvo" [in Russian], ["Christmas"], MS, TS. 1952, , trans. by the author, ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1992. Previously published in another form as Antonina G. Gladky, "Rozhdestvo" [in Russian] newsp *Rossia*, (New York: Rossia Publishing. January 10, 1953). Also, as Antonina G. Gladky, "Christmas Memories Of Childhood In Russia," newsp. *Thomasville Observer* (Thomasville, NC, December 24, 1988). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro

## Christmas Festivities

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

I remember that as I was growing up the most memorable of all festivities was, of course, Christmas. For a whole week there were preparations for that day: the entire house was thoroughly cleaned; festive tablecloths, table runners, and doilies were put on the tables. The day before Christmas, all the children were bathed. Near our beds our festive clothes were laid out, so we would be ready early in the morning for church. New dresses had been made for the girls and new suits for the boys.

All the food was prepared in advance—there was no cooking done on holiday. On Christmas Eve we had a Holy Supper; only lenten food was prepared for that occasion. In the dining room, under the icon with its lit icon lamp, on a small corner table covered with straw was a new earthenware pot full of *kutya*<sup>1</sup> and another one of sweet *uzvar*.<sup>2</sup> These were two traditional Christmas Eve dishes that were first taken to be blessed in church. The dining table covered with its festive tablecloth would be set up with cold dishes, such as jellied fish *som*<sup>3</sup> fish in tomato sauce; pickled cabbage; and boiled millet with a dressing of onions sautéed in sunflower oil. There were always baked or fried *pyrozhky*, which were about four inch individual pies, stuffed with boiled dry beans, or mashed potatoes, or sautéed sauerkraut. In the middle of each dish stood a straw cross.

The whole family would gather in the evening, our grandmother coming from the village. After the first star appeared in the sky, we would all sit at the table, including our servants. My father would say a prayer, and then everyone would cross himself or herself and start to eat. At the end of the meal we would all eat *kutya* with honey and *uzvar*.

Then my grandmother would tell the children the wonderful story of Christmas. After that, the younger ones were put to bed and the older ones helped the adults set up

a Christmas tree and adorn it with pretty decorations collected throughout the years and chains of colored paper made by us children. And when the older children were also in bed, our father and mother would put the presents under the tree.

Christmas morning we would all get up early and run to see our Christmas tree and all the presents placed around it. We would try to outguess each other as to what was in each package. We could not touch them until we all returned from the morning service. "Hurry, hurry!" Our mother would call, "Dress up in your festive clothes! We will be late for church!" I remember that the whole family, including our servants, would walk to church. It was always very cold and, as we walked, the snow crunched under our feet and the frost bit our cheeks and noses.

Christmas Service in church was very long and solemn. The choir sang beautiful, triumphant songs about the birth of Christ. The clergymen wore ceremonial robes embroidered with golden threads that shone in the flickering light as if they were from some enchanted story. The burning oil lamp, candles, and incense emanated a balmy, sweet smell that added to the mysterious, sublime atmosphere. We knelt and prayed according to Christian Orthodox Church rites as we had been taught in school, where Religion was a required subject for all but Jewish children.

When the service ended, all the parishioners would congratulate each other, "*S Rozhdestvom Khristovym!*" which means "Merry Christmas!"

The men shook hands and the women embraced or kissed one another as they replied, "*S Rozhdestvom Khristovym!*"

The children pulled their mothers' and fathers' sleeves impatiently, imploring them:

"Let's hurry home!"

"I want to see my presents."

"Let's go and see what *Dyed Moroz*<sup>4</sup> had brought to us!"

We would then hurry home to open our presents. Each of us found a package of candies and chocolates. The younger children found under the tree bigger packages with toys—a doll, a rocking horse, or a train. The older ones found small packages with gold locket, chains, or earrings. For grandmother there would be a new kerchief, or a blouse, and for my mother some trinket for the house. My father got no presents, because there was no custom to give presents to grown-up men.

The Christmas dinner, prepared the day before, would already be on the table. Holiday dishes would be elaborately decorated and my mother would prepare special foods such as roast duck, or goose with Macintosh apples baked together with the fowl. There would always be *okorok*—a whole ham, and homemade *kolbasa*—a sausage, both baked in the oven and served with sautéed, pickled cabbage. And, of course, there was a *kholodyets* made from pig's legs boiled until the broth would become jellied when cooled in the cellar. For holidays my mother also bought some delicacies at the Taganesov's store: smoked salami or ham; sardines or spiced sprats; smoked fish; tiny, spiced, salted fish called *kilka*; black or red caviar; and a variety of cheeses.

For dessert she would prepare rice pudding with lots of sweet raisins. There would also be large oval trays loaded with all kinds of cookies, pastries, and cakes, sweetbreads with candied fruit, and small baked *pyrozhki* stuffed with fruit preserves from our own garden. Then there were several fancy-shaped bowls filled with assorted candies and chocolates, too.

After dinner the table would be neatened and set with refreshments for guests. My mother put a bottle of vodka and a selection of her noted brandied fruit drinks called *nalivka* on the table. Our neighbors stopped by to bring holiday greetings to our family; my father's customers would also drop in for a few minutes. They all would bring gifts for us children, mostly boxes of chocolates or candies—so many that we would munch for weeks after. Then the guests would sit down and have refreshments. The men preferred to have *pirozhki* or a slice of bread and caviar and most of them usually had a small glass of vodka or *nalivka*. The women preferred to have a slice of sweetbread or a pastry and *nalivka*. And the visiting children would be offered cookies, candies, and chocolates.

In the late afternoon and early evening, the youth and older children would go to the pond where there would be a skating competition in which everybody could participate. I liked to skate, but I never won in any competition. We would all come home tired after such a busy day.

After supper my mother and father went out to visit with their longtime friends, the Umrykhyns. He, as I recall, worked for many years as a salesman at the hardware store. My parents usually stayed there until late at night. Our Babushka Anna would stay with us and tell us folk fairy tales. Sometimes the story was a happy one, and sometimes it was scary. If it was scary, we would cuddle up close to each other and listen with trepidation, afraid of how it would end.

On one of those Christmas nights we were in the dining room sitting on the carpet under the big lamp listening quietly to Babushka as she told us a folk tale about a goblin named *Domovoy*, an ugly and evil spirit. She told us about his mischievous behavior, how he liked to amuse himself by watching the people he scared with his little tricks. And suddenly in the middle of the story we heard, "Tack... tack... tack..." Then a few minutes of silence, and then again, "Tack... tack... tack..."

Babushka stopped telling her tale and sat in silence listening attentively, trying to hear if the noise would repeat itself. And it did, "Tack... tack... tack..." We all drew close to her and grabbed her by the skirt. Then she got up, put her finger to her lips in a sign to keep quiet, and went tiptoeing out into the hall leading to the porch door.

We followed her, holding our breath. We couldn't hear anything. Then we went to the bedroom door trying to hear if the noise was coming from there. For a while there was again silence. Then we heard it, right over our heads, "Tack... tack... tack..." In apprehension, we turned in the direction of the noise and raised our heads. We saw that a loosened flue cover on the chimney wall was fluttering from the wind that blew down the chimney.

Though we found out what had been making the noise, we were not really sure if it was the wind or if it was *Domovoy* who had played a trick on us. We were still scared when Babushka told us to go to sleep, and we jumped into our beds and pulled the blankets up over our heads. For a long time we remembered this incident with apprehension and were fearful of unknown noises in the night. "What is it?" we would fearfully ask. And someone would reply, "Maybe it's *Domovoy*!"

On Christmas day our school vacations began. The whole week after Christmas, all the schools held celebrations for their students and all the students were allowed to invite their friends as guests, that way it was more fun. On those occasions we all would wear our festive school uniforms. At each school, in the middle of the auditorium there

would be a huge Christmas tree adorned with shiny toys, paper chains, and fluffy cotton “snow,” with a huge silver star on its top. All the students would receive presents, usually chocolates and candies, which they shared with their guests. The children would form one or two chains, holding hands, singing Christmas songs, and dancing in a circle to the accompanying piano music. Sometimes we would go to two or three other schools and come home joyous but exhausted.

I always vividly remembered those happy Christmas holidays of my childhood in my home and later in my declining years wrote a poem<sup>5</sup> about it.

On other, less important holidays, all the schools in town would bring their students to the church for a special school service. All the students would wear their Sunday uniforms and would walk from school to church in pairs. The class preceptress (as the governess was called, in the schools for girls) or preceptor (in the schools for boys) would accompany each class. Mothers and townsfolk would come outside or look out their windows at the procession. All the schools had their assigned place in church. It was all so orderly and pretty to see each section with the children wearing the same color school uniforms. The girls wore wine-red, light-blue, or green dresses with white aprons and donned felt hats in the fall and winter, or straw hats with ribbons of the same color as their dresses in the spring and summer. The boys wore gray, navy-blue, or brown uniforms with shiny metal buttons and cockaded visor hats that they would hold under their left arms in church. This ceremonial and festive atmosphere elevated our mood and made our required recitation of prayers in the church more enjoyable.

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1. Traditional Christmas Eve dish made from boiled wheat grain.

2. Compote made exclusively from dry fruits: apples, prunes, cherries, pears, and apricots.

3. Sheatfish, a large freshwater catfish, poached and eaten cold.

4. Santa Claus.

5. See the poem “Christmas” by Antonina G. Gladky.

## New Year’s Eve And Epiphany

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

I also remember a folk tradition that my mother strictly adhered to that was fun for us children and became even more enjoyable as we grew older. It was the New Year’s Eve fortune-telling custom called *gadanie*. On that night it was believed that all kinds of signs could be interpreted to discover what to expect in the New Year. This tradition belonged only to girls and women. Young and old, our friends and our mother’s friends, would gather in the evening and sit in a semi dark room lit only by candlelight and perform shadow shows and other tricks that had been passed down from generation to generation.

One of the preferred ways to foretell events that might happen in the next year was to burn a piece of crumpled paper on top of an old dish turned upside down in a room lighted by the candle. When the paper stopped burning everybody looked at the shadow cast by the ashes on the wall, and turning the plate until someone recognized something familiar.

"A ship!" somebody would exclaim.

"No, no... It is a church!" another would guess.

"It is a wedding.. See, there are the bride and groom," a young girl would joyously announce. "Maybe it's for me!" And everyone would laugh.

"Turn, turn it some more! It looks like a big bear. What could that mean?"

"A long, cold winter ahead," some older person would say.

And then they would burn some more paper and guess, than guess again until everyone had made an interpretation for themselves. The older folks would look more for a prediction of what might happen to adults and the family—births or deaths, town matters, weather or crops, or many other practical things. And the young girls looked for what to expect in their personal lives—names of boyfriends, romantic encounters, or signs of marriage.

Later in the evening when the younger children were put to bed, the older girls would place a shallow basin filled with water in the middle of the table, stick pieces of paper with men's names around its edges, and in the water set half of a walnut shell to float. In turn, each girl would stir the water with her finger, and then anxiously wait to see where the shell stopped and what name was closest to it. If it were a familiar name they all would laugh and joke about him; if it was a strange name they would guess who he might be.

Closer to midnight the girls would run outside and throw a shoe to see in what direction it pointed when landed. That was the direction in which the young man was supposed to live. Also, shortly before midnight my mother would gather up a few old shoes or dishes to throw outside because that meant she would be able to buy new things in the New Year.

Early in the morning of the New Year, it was important to listen to the first words one heard because they were an omen of what to expect in the New Year. We sisters would share what each of us had heard, "I heard Mother saying to the servant to 'hurry up.' That means a very busy year for me!" Or, "I heard my brother saying 'stop doing that!'" And the puzzled girl would try to guess what she should stop doing in the New Year. In our young minds, we believed without question in all these folk tales because all the adults around us also believed in them.

Another memorable ceremony took place on the twelfth day after Christmas, when the entire town gathered early in the morning on the shore of the River Toret for Epiphany, called *Kreshcheniye*. The clergymen performed the religious rite of sanctifying the river water and everybody would fill a container with this holy water and take it home. Each room in the house, the sheds, the barns, and the garden and courtyard were sprinkled with this holy water to protect the household from evil. Before entering a room my father would light a candle, make a cross with its flame at the door, and then sprinkle the holy water inside the room.

Sometimes, when the river was not solid frozen, a few really courageous souls would jump into the river for a short dip in the holy water to be re-Christened in a sign of

devotion to the Christian faith.

The day after *Kreshcheniye*, our school vacation was over and we would all go back to school. At school we shared our impressions of the previous day and wondered how some people could be so courageous as to jump into the icy water. We would shudder and exclaim, "I would never dare do that!"

## Our Parents Loved Us

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

My mother's most remarkable traits; one that I always remember was that she was equally proud of all of her children and did not show preference to any one of us. I heard her become impatient many times with friends or neighbors who would single one of us out as the object of their compliments. It would happen often in the evening when some of our neighbors came to sit with my mother on the bench near our gate, crack sunflower seeds, and share quiet casual conversation. Or, it might also happen when some of her friends came for an afternoon tea.

When one of her friends would praise one of us children—especially in our presence—by saying, "What a pretty girl your Tanya has become! She has such beautiful, large, brown eyes and wavy, brown hair like her father," or some similar comment, my mother would impatiently interrupt her. She would embrace me or any of my other sisters, and eagerly start praising the rest of us, "You are right about my Tanya. But, although my Tonya may not be as pretty as Tanya is, she is very likable girl, smart and diligent. In school, all her teachers praise her." Then she would add, "And my Nyusya and *Olyechka* are very pretty, too; they have a light complexion like my side of the family and they have very gentle manners."

The same thing happened whenever somebody praised one of her sons. She would not allow anyone to single out any one of them. Each one had something that she was proud of: "Kolya, he is the oldest, he is studying well...", "Vanya is handsome and tall for his age... and Shura... Oh! Shura is the best helper any mother could want. At any time, he gets the samovar ready for guests. And, if there are no guests, he sits down and has tea with me..."

We all knew that our mother and father loved us, but neither openly or routinely showed their affection. They rarely kissed us, embraced us, or told us that they loved us. Very young children were allowed to sit on their knees or cuddle in their lap. There was no required ceremony of kissing Father and Mother in the morning or before going to bed. However, we were expected to say "Good morning, Mama!" and "Good morning, Papa!" when we came in for breakfast, and "Good night!" to both of them before we went to sleep. Also we were expected to address Father and Mother in the respectful form of "You," used in Russian when one spoke to persons of higher rank or older people.

My mother used kisses more as a reward for good behavior or good grades in

school. In those cases, she would embrace us or caress and kiss our cheeks, rewarding us with phrases like, "Good girl!" or "You are my clever girl!"

My father was even more reserved about showing his affection. He would come to our room when we were supposed to be sound asleep (which was not always the case, because we all pretended to be sleeping when he opened the door). He would check on each of us to see if we were covered with blankets and pull them up to cover our ears. Then he would bend over and give us a light kiss on the forehead or temple, mumble a blessing and, holding the tips of his thumb, forefinger, and middle finger of his right hand together, make a wide cross over us. At that moment, we knew that our father loved us.

## Learning Right From Wrong

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

We children used kisses as a means of asking our father or mother for forgiveness after we had done something considered to be wrong. I remember one such event, when I was about seven and my sister Nyusya was about six years old. We decided to play at having a vegetable and fruit market and collected our "merchandise" on a bench in our garden. Our attention was caught by a special kind of very tiny apples, Japanese apples that grew in our neighbor's garden. In our garden we had only the usual large apples, which we felt were too big for a make-believe market.

The two properties were divided by a fence, which we climbed over. We were overwhelmed by the abundance of fruit on that tree. The bottom branches were so heavy that they almost touched the ground already covered with a blanket of the fallen fruit. At first we picked the withered fruit up from the ground, but then our attention was caught by the fruit on the tree. The apples were shiny and pretty-looking, a light amber color with one cheek blushing red. We began to fill our apron pockets. We were so involved selecting the best-looking fruit that we did not hear the owner of the garden tiptoe close enough to grab both of us by the arms.

He led us directly to our father. On the way he held our arms tight and repeated in a threatening voice, "You little thieves!... You little thieves! I will teach you not to steal fruit from other people's gardens!" And upon entering our father's tailor shop, he exclaimed triumphantly, "Here, Gavriyl Daniylovich, look who I caught in my garden stealing my Japanese apples! I hope you will teach them a good lesson!"

"Empty your pockets!" my father sternly ordered, "And return all the apples to our neighbor!"

Our neighbor collected them with an air of righteousness as he repeated his demand, "Teach them a good lesson!"

"I am sorry that my daughters got into your garden," said my father, "I will punish them for their transgression."

When our neighbor was gone my father didn't even ask us why we took them. He

gave us a long admonition, and explained why we shouldn't take things belonging to other people without their permission. "Remember, this should not ever happen again. For your punishment," he ordered us, "go into different rooms and stay in a corner on your knees until you repent."

I was knelt in the corner, feeling sorry for myself and thinking that our neighbor was a greedy man who made our father punish us for taking a pocketful of apples when he had so many and most were rotting on the ground.

After some time my mother came into the room and asked me, "Well, haven't you repented yet? Go, and ask your father for forgiveness!"

"No!" I stubbornly refused, "No and no!"

"If you feel that way, then you will stay the rest of the day in the corner," my mother said in a stern but quiet voice.

At intervals she would come and ask me the same question, and I would refuse again and again. My knees were hurting, but I would not cry. The last time my mother came, she told me that Nyusya had asked for forgiveness already and it was time for me to do the same. This time I gave up and went to my father.

"I am sorry, Papa," I said quickly, expecting his immediate forgiveness.

"And?..." My father raised his eyebrows looking at me inquisitively over the glasses perched on the middle of his nose. He patiently waited for me to continue.

"I promise, it won't ever happen again," I added and quickly kissed him on the cheek hoping that he finally will give me the absolution.

"Was it a good lesson for you?" he asked me in a stern but not an angry voice.

"Ye-e-e-s...", I answered hesitantly, still not convinced that my punishment was justified. But I didn't blame my father; I was angry with our greedy neighbor who had demanded our punishment.

"Well, go and play outside with your sister," said my father gently, and he kissed me on my forehead. And I felt that he loved me.

Just as my father did, my mother usually spoke to us children very calmly and did not raise her voice or scold us very often. However, I remember one time when my stubbornness was too much for her. It was at a time when she did not have a servant to help her with the daily chores. My mother asked me to sweep the kitchen floor, but I refused to do it and, when she tried to put a broom in my hands, I ran away from her. She ran after me with the broom. We ran round and round the kitchen table. By then she was really upset, and she lost her temper and punished me. But, in the end, I still didn't sweep the kitchen because she needed it done right away and so one of my sisters did it.

My father didn't use corporal punishment with us girls, but I remember one incident when he did use it on my brother Kolya. It was summer, and all the fruit trees in our garden were thickly covered with foliage. Close to the porch we had a tall, old pear tree. My father went outside to do some chores and saw that smoke was coming from the pear tree. He came closer and saw my brother sitting on a branch, smoking.

"Come down, come down, son," my father very calmly told him. Kolya slowly came down. "You see those lilac bushes over there?" Father asked and added very firmly, "Well, go and cut some good branches and bring them to me."

"Yes, Papa," replied Kolya with resignation.

Kolya took his time to cut a bunch of brunches and handed them to my father

knowing well what to expect next.

"Now, lie down across this bench," father told him firmly. There was no way to argue with my father. He whipped Kolya so hard that Kolya lost his voice from screaming. But the lesson was well worth it, because after that, his entire life long, my brother never smoked.

## I Hated Freckles And Loved To Be Funny

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

With so many brothers and sisters, all the children resembled either my father's or my mother's side of the family. I remember as a young girl that I felt early on the disappointment of not being as pretty as the rest of them, whom I considered to be very handsome. I always thought that I more resembled my paternal Babushka whose old face was weathered from working in the fields.

One of the bitterest experiences I had was in dealing with my red freckles. Oh! How I hated those freckles! I had them on my nose, on my face, and on my arms. Everywhere I went, children teased me, especially the boys, "Red freckles!.. Red freckles!.. Ha-ha-ha!" How this annoyed me and made me very unhappy! This feeling grew even bitterer as I got older when, while on my way to gymnasium, the older boys would tease me. I would get all red in the face, which made it worse, because then they would have even more fun teasing me. But I compensated for this by being very vivacious and funny, and the children who knew me liked me for it and I had many friends.

My sister Nyusya was only one year younger than I, and we had a lot of fun together. She loved to listen to me imitating all kinds of foreign languages, which I did very well. I remember that one time many Chinese men came to our town. They sold door-to-door silk fabrics that they called "*Che-su-cha*." They carried big bags of merchandise on their backs and, when invited into a house, would display all the fabrics on the table. They spoke broken Russian with such a funny Chinese accent that we children, who gathered around to see the spectacle, could not keep from laughing. It seemed that the Chinese didn't mind this and happily laughed with us, "Khi-khi-khi, khi-khi-khi..."

In the evening, when we sat with Nyusya on the bench outside our gate, I used to entertain her. I would say, "I have already learned how to speak Chinese." She would ask me to show her how well I could speak it. And I would start to babble, imitating a Chinese accent. Nyusya would laugh and laugh, and ask me to "speak Chinese" again and again, sometimes laughing until she wet her panties.

Every summer a very good circus came to our town and stayed for several weeks. What entertainment it was for us children! I didn't care much for the acrobats, but I liked the dancing horses and, most of all, I loved the clowns. After the circus was long gone, I entertained my brothers and sisters and our friends by imitating the clowns.

One summer, when I was twelve or thirteen, I and a neighbor boy who was probably fourteen or fifteen, decided to have our own circus. He lived not too far from our house. His family had a big courtyard and a large barn. He cleaned up the barn and built a trapeze on which he could perform with another boy. He also recruited some neighborhood girls and boys as actors. Of course I decided to be a clown. The other girls were going to be dancing horses.

All the neighbors were invited to our circus. They had to bring their own benches or chairs. Usually, we had from thirty to fifty people, both children and adults, in the audience. My performance as a clown was so funny that I became the star of the show. I even received flowers and candies from my admirers. The show was very successful, and we repeated it for couple of summers until we lost interest in it as we grew older. By that time I had many friends, both girls and boys, with whom I had a lot of fun. And somehow the freckles didn't bother me any more because my friends liked me as I was, maybe they didn't even notice them.

## My Mother Was A Thrifty Housewife

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

During my last years in gymnasium my sisters and I helped my mother with some of the chores, especially during school vacations. I watched my mother with admiration. I was impressed with her ability to manage the household and budget for such a large family. She was an economy conscious housewife and kept expenses down by buying provisions in season and in quantity and wisely managing household help. She usually purchased fresh vegetables at the market, but most of the vegetables for preserving for winter provisions were bought at reduced rates from my grandfather Daniyl when he brought the produce from his garden to market on Sundays.

Summer was a very busy time for my mother. My grandmother Anna, aunt Katya, and one of the servants helped my mother with the traditional<sup>1</sup> pickling of vegetables in large wooden barrels. They pickled green and red-ripe tomatoes, large red peppers, cucumbers, and cabbage with which were also pickled sweet-sour tasting Antonovka apples that my father liked very much. All the other vegetables were preserved for the winter in a cool cellar that was dug deep under our house and had a separate hatchway next to the back entrance of the kitchen.

At the farmers' market, my mother purchased provisions sufficient for the whole winter: flour, salted lard, sunflower seed oil, and all kinds of grains for a *kasha*. She stored it all in a large pantry off the kitchen. In addition, she purchased pounds and pounds of butter, melted it on low heat, skimmed the white foam, then poured the clarified butter into bottles, sealed them with corks and sealing wax, and stored them in the cellar. When she needed the butter, she would simply put a bottle in warm water and it was ready for cooking. This butter didn't spatter because all liquid and milk residue was removed from it.

To keep the house cool in the summer, all the cooking was done in the summer kitchen, a wooden structure in the courtyard. In it was a big brick stove with a large oven, allowing my mother to do all the cooking and baking outside. Nearby stood an old, tall, shady pear tree around which was built a table and benches that we sat at for meals on hot summer days.

When the fruits, many of which grew in our garden, were ripe and sweet, all of us children helped to pick them. Of course as we picked them we ate as much as we wanted. My mother would carefully select the best fruits, wash them thoroughly, and then following a precise recipe of equal weights of fruit and sugar or honey prepared all kinds of preserves.

The first fruits to ripen were strawberries, next were cherries and sour cherries, raspberries and gooseberries. The red, white, and black currants ripened a little bit later. Then it was the turn of the apricots and plums, apples and pears, and small Japanese apples, which she had to buy from our neighbor. In the summer, we also gathered the pink, wild-rose flowers from the eglantine bushes that grew in our garden. My mother made a delicious, pink sweet smelling, delicate preserve from the petals.

The preserves were cooked on low heat in a wide copper basin and, to prevent the mixture from sticking to the bottom, it was constantly stirred with a large spoon for several hours until the syrup reached the consistency of fresh honey. As it simmered, a white foam formed on the bubbling surface and my mother constantly skimmed it with a spoon and collected it on a plate. All my sisters and brothers hung around the summer kitchen taking turns licking the sticky foam from a small spoon that was placed there especially for us. For the rest of my life, I vividly remembered those happy times of my childhood when I played in the garden with my younger sister, Nyusya, while my mother made preserves, and later I wrote a poem<sup>2</sup> about it.

My mother also prepared a specialty that my father liked very much, sweet-and-sour marinated plums. And we children helped her by carefully skewering each plum with a pin, allowing the juice to flow out, and then placing them in neat layers in terra cotta jars. Next, my mother made a marinade of vinegar, sugar, and laurel leaf and poured it over the fruit. The jar was then covered and left on the shelf to be aged for several weeks before the plums were ready to eat.

My father also liked my mother's homemade *nalivka*, a fruit liquor made of various fruits: cherries, plums, raspberries, black currants and eglantine rose petals. About half a bottle was filled with skewered fruit, then sugar was added in equal weight to the fruit. Each bottleneck was covered with gauze and the bottle was placed on a sunny windowsill for several days until the fruit's juice was released and fermentation began. Then the bottle was filled with vodka, sealed with a cork, gently shaken and placed in the pantry to be aged for at least a month.

My mother fed the family well, not only with nutritious foods, but also with a variety of very tasty meals. She was a very good cook and knew how to use cheaper meat cuts to prepare delicious dishes. Although it was always more work and took a lot of her time, it was worth it to see her family enjoy food that was healthful and nutritious and cost about half as much as meals with expensive cuts of meat. However, on Sundays and holidays she prepared roasts from expensive cuts of beef, pork, lamb, chicken, ducks or geese. She knew how to cook all the traditional Ukrainian foods, like *borshch* and *kasha*. But she also knew how to make more elaborately prepared

dishes—desserts, pies, cookies, and other baked goodies.

For breakfast, the younger children ate cream of wheat cooked in milk and drank warm boiled milk. The older children and adults on any morning could have a soft-boiled or fried egg with bread and butter. Other choices mainly depended upon what was in season. In the spring and summer everybody liked to have some kind of salad—lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers, or radishes—all included scallions, hard-boiled egg, and sour cream dressing.

Later in the summer when eggplants were in season, I always asked my mother to make my preferred spread, *ykra*, which I liked to heap high on a slice of bread. It was made from the pulps of a baked eggplant and tomato flesh and seasoned with onions sautéed in sunflower seed oil.

In the winter my mother prepared the nutritious *pashtyet*, a spread made of boiled, finely chopped liver with onions that had been sautéed in sunflower oil. It was always ready for us children to spread on a piece of bread for breakfast or for a snack.

My father preferred a stronger tasting spread, *farshmak*. It was made of finely chopped, salted herring and fresh onions mixed with bread soaked in sunflower seed oil and vinegar. Sometimes my father simply liked to have marinated herring with a slice of bread.

In the winter we had the always-popular Russian salad, *vinaigrette*, made of boiled, cubed potatoes, beets, pickles, and fresh onions with a dressing of sunflower seed oil and vinegar. My father always added lots of pepper to it, because my mother used pepper sparingly in her cooking for us children.

In the morning, for the children there was always warm boiled milk to drink. But in summer my father liked to drink sour, refreshing buttermilk that was stored in the cellar. My mother always liked to drink hot tea, with either milk or a slice of lemon. For lunch and dinner at the dining table there was lemonade or plain water. My father, however, preferred to drink *kvass*, a homemade fermented drink made from dry bread, yeast, water, and sugar. My mother aged the *kvass* in a small wooden barrel placed in the pantry off the kitchen and always kept a big pitcher full of the cool drink in the cellar.

For the first course of lunch and dinner there was always *borshch*, or some other soup. There were two kinds of *borshch*, one made with meat stock and small pieces of meat in it, and one that was meatless, with a condiment of onions sautéed in sunflower seed oil. Soups were made with potatoes, carrots, onions, and always had added to it one of the filling ingredients: *lapsha*, a homemade egg noodles; or *galushky*, small pieces of soft loosely kneaded dough pinched with the fingers; or *ushky*, tortellini stuffed with minced meat; or pearl-barley, or rice, or some other kind of grain.

In the summer some soups were served cold. Everybody in our family liked *shchavelny borshch*, a soup made of meat stock, potatoes, and coarsely chopped sour sorrel leaves and fried onions, spiced with dill and served with coarsely chopped hard-boiled eggs and a spoon of sour cream. My father, however, preferred to have *okroshka*, a cold soup made with *kvass* or with yogurt, mixed with finely-sliced fresh cucumbers, radishes, and green onions, served with small pieces of *taranka*, a dry, salted, sun dried sea roach fish found in the Azov Sea. On occasion, my mother made a kidney soup with beef kidneys (that she soaked first in vinegar), potatoes, and onions sautéed in butter, served with finely diced newly pickled cucumbers.

For the second course of lunch and dinner my mother prepared such a variety of

meat and fish dishes that I can't remember them all. The meats and fish were served usually with *kasha* made from some kind of grain, or with rice, or noodles flavored with butter; or with mashed potatoes; or white or red beans, or peas, or lentils flavored with onions sautéed in sunflower seed oil. There was always a tray on the table with pickled tomatoes, pickles, peppers, and cabbage. Each person would take as much as he liked to add some sour flavor to the food.

The most common of the meat and fish dishes was *kotlyety*, patties made of ground meat or fish (with some bread soaked in milk), eggs, chopped onions, salt and pepper, rolled in breaded crumbs and sautéed in clarified butter. There was another meat dish called *tiftyely*, meatballs in tomato sauce baked in the oven. We all also liked *golubtsy*, made of cooked minced meat mixed with cooked rice and eggs, wrapped in cabbage leaves, covered with tomato sauce and baked in the oven. In season my mother made our favorite dish—*farshyrovany* sweet red peppers or squash, stuffed with a mixture of cooked minced meat, rice, shredded carrots, eggs, onions sautéed in sunflower oil, and fresh dill, covered with tomato sauce and baked in the oven.

But one of the family's favorite dishes was *varenyky*, a kind of large ravioli. The filling varied with the season and the occasion. Sometimes they were filled with cooked minced meat and served with sour cream; sometimes with mashed potatoes or with sautéed, pickled cabbage and seasoned with onions sautéed in sunflower oil; and sometimes they were filled with cottage cheese and served with sour cream or fruit preserves, or powdered sugar; and in the summer, they were filled with sweetened sour cherries and served with sour cream or honey.

My father also very much liked *kholodyets* made from boiled pork legs or portions of pig head, jellied in the cold cellar and served with homemade mustard, vinegar or horseradish.

For the evening meal my mother often made *oladky*, small, thick pancakes that we children liked to eat either with sour cream, fruit preserves, or honey; or she made *blinchyki*, delicate thin crepes filled with precooked minced meat, or cottage cheese, or stewed fruit in season, and served with sour cream.

In the evenings we often had some kind of *kasha*, or porridge: buckwheat *kasha* served with butter or milk; millet *kasha* mixed with mashed, baked pumpkin, butter and sugar; or, in season, we had young sweet corn-on-the-cob with butter.

For snacks and for refreshment when the occasional guest stopped by, my mother used to bake *pirozhky*, small individual pies made of yeast dough with all kinds of fillings: precooked minced meat basted with butter; mashed potatoes; cooked, mashed white beans; mushrooms; or sautéed pickled cabbage. Each of these fillings was basted with onions sautéed in sunflower seed oil. Or the *pirozhky* were filled with rice mixed with chopped hard boiled eggs and basted with butter; or, in season, with fruits from our garden—sour cherries, apricots, apples or gooseberries.

At any time of the day we children could have a snack of plain cookies called *korzhyki*, and, of course, any fruits in season from our garden. Some of us preferred to have just bread and butter; and all us children loved *googol-mogol*, an egg yoke creamed with sugar and butter. We liked to make it ourselves sitting on the bench under the pear tree.

For dessert my mother prepared either *kissel*, a potato starch pudding with fruit; or custard made of eggs and milk. She also often made *yablochnyk*, a rice pudding with

sliced apples that was baked in the oven. In season, she baked apples and served them with an abundance of honey, or compote made of fresh fruit in the summer or *uzvar* made of dried fruit in the winter.

On Sundays and holidays my mother prepared special dishes. All of us liked fried or roasted chicken with fried potatoes. My father and brother Kolya preferred lamb roast or stew with potatoes. My father also liked roasted duck or goose with Antonovka apples cooked together with the fowl. My mother's preferred dish was jellied or baked freshwater fish, such as perch, pike, or carp, which she stuffed with a mixture of rice and hard-boiled egg. The fish she usually served with mashed potatoes. Occasionally, to our delight, she would buy the local crayfish. We all liked baked ham or the homemade thick sausage called *kolbasa*, both served with sautéed pickled cabbage.

Then, for big holidays she would spend extra to make a meal special. She would buy from the Taganesov's store delicacies like smoked salami, ham, or fish, sardines, sprats, *kilka*, Dutch cheese and other cheeses.

However, my mother's specialty was baking. Every week she baked whole grain bread for our meals, sweet bread with raisins to have with tea or breakfast, fruit pies with fruits in season, and all kinds of cookies, pastries and cakes.

My older sister, Tanya, liked to help my mother when she was baking, and she learned all my mother's recipes and baking skills. But, I, notwithstanding my admiration of my mother's culinary skills, was never interested in baking or cooking. I simply didn't like to cook. Instead, as I grew older, I preferred reading books, especially the French and Russian classics that I was fascinated with.

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1. See the chapter "How Daniyl and Anna Lived."

2. See the poem "Golden Childhood."

## Ties With Grandparents and Relatives

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

My father was always so busy with his tailoring business that he could never find the time to travel and visit his relatives in the village of Nikolskoye. Over time he lost touch with most of them. But his father and mother kept in touch with him and with our family. After market on Sundays, our grandfather, *Dyedushka* Daniyl, would stop in our house and visit with our father in his tailor shop. Sometimes he would be accompanied by his oldest son, our uncle Stepan. Usually, my father would offer them a snack of salted herring and a glass of vodka. Grandfather could not stay long at our house because the visits were always during harvest season. He had to be back in his village by Sunday night so as to be up early the next day to work in their vegetable garden and melon fields.

When Dyedushka came to visit, all of us children would greet him, "*Zdravstvuyte*,

Dyedushka!" - Greetings, Grandfather! There was no kissing.

He would ask each of us, "Have you been a good girl?" or "Have you have been a good boy?"

Of course, the answer was always the same, "Yes, Dyedushka."

Then he would give each of us a hug and a five kopecks copper coin, that was one twentieth of a ruble, and we would always thank him politely, "*Spasibo*, Dyedushka." - "Thank you, Grandfather." These coins we could spend as we pleased, mostly for ice cream or sweets.

For some reason my mother was never very friendly with her father in law or brother-in-law, and I don't remember that she ever invited them to eat with us. All I remember is that she used to talk with Dyedushka or Uncle Stepan only when they brought for our family selected vegetables for pickling, or winter provisions of potatoes, carrots, beets, cabbage, and onions, and at that time she bargained with them over the price.

However, I never heard my grandfather complain to my father that they were not treated well by my mother. But I heard occasionally that Babushka did complain to my father that his "proud Polish wife" did not treat Berezhnoy relatives with the same respect and attention that she gave her Polish relatives. On these grounds, my father and mother had an occasional quarrel.

But my father probably didn't give too much importance to the matter because my mother's father and mother visited our family so rarely. Usually they came with our uncle Fyedyia from Ysyum for short visits with our family. They always stayed with their daughter, Katya, who only had one daughter and so could provide the extra care needed for her father, who was already deaf and blind, and her mother, who was also in poor health.

I have very dim memories of my maternal grandfather and grandmother because they died when I was very young. I remember that both were short with curved backs and needed someone to sustain them when they were walking.

As for my mother's other relatives, Aunt Katya lived right in Slavyansk and she, her husband, and their daughter, Sasha, often visited our family. My mother was very fond of her older sister, but, with so much work to do for her large family, she rarely visited her. My father also had a friendly relationship with his brother-in-law, Novogadsky. Later when Aunt Katya's husband died from tuberculosis, she came and lived with us for a very long time. She helped my mother with us children and the family chores.

My mother's brother, Uncle Fyedyia, often visited us because he came to Slavyansk for business; usually, on those occasions, he stayed for lunch or dinner with our family. My father respected him, and at dinnertime they always discussed business matters in which Uncle Fyedyia had a lot of experience and my father often asked for his advice.

Therefore, relationships with my father's and mother's relatives became defined naturally by their mutual needs, interests, and by the time they had to travel and stay away from their work and daily obligations.

For as long as I can remember, it was only my paternal grandmother Anna who stayed with us often and for long periods of time. This was because, with all the children and the housework, my mother always needed her mother-in-law's help.

However, she really didn't have friendly or lengthy conversations with her. Maybe it was because both of them were usually busy and, when they did talk, my mother was telling my grandmother something about the things to be done around the house or about us children. I don't remember, however, that they ever quarreled or argued. My Babushka was very tolerant of and patient with my mother and with all of us children.

Babushka Anna loved all her grandchildren, and we felt her affection very much. However, I always felt and thought that she loved me more than any of my sisters or brothers, and I loved her very much, too. When she came to stay with us, she brought bags of freshly roasted sunflower or pumpkin seeds. She wore always a big apron over her skirt and her skirt pocket was always full of seeds. When she arrived from the village, we would touch her pocket right away and try to guess what kind of seeds she had. Then we put our hands under her apron and dug out a handful of seeds from her pocket.

As the years went by, Babushka Anna began to complain that Dyedushka Daniyl was drinking heavily and could not keep up with the work required to maintain the vegetable garden and the melon field. Stepan's wife and daughters took over that work. Dyedushka helped them for a while, but he could not stop drinking and eventually died of liver disease. My father went to his father's funeral and brought back with him what Dyedushka had left for each of his grandchildren, one five ruble gold coin that I kept for many years and passed on to my daughter as a family heirloom.

After her husband's death, Babushka stayed with us for very long periods of time, going to the village only when she had to help feed Stepan's family—when the women were busy with the harvest in the fall or in the spring with planting. Her son Stepan and his wife were now bringing the produce to the market, so they came and got Babushka, took her to the village and then brought her back to our home.

When I was in my last years at gymnasium, our Babushka complained that she felt something growing in her abdomen. Nobody took it seriously; everybody told her that she was just getting fat because she wasn't working so hard in the fields anymore. Then one day, she went to the village and never returned to us. Uncle Stepan told us she began to have very strong pains and stayed in bed all the time. Soon after that she died, and, for some unknown reason, only my father went to her funeral. I missed her greatly, and after all these years I still remember her with affection.

## Kharkovsky Street

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

I remember<sup>1</sup> that, when I was a teenager, the Belichenkos were our neighbors on Kharkovsky Street in Slavyansk. My mother and Maria Ivanovna Belichenko were very good friends. Many afternoons they sat for hours at our big oval table in the dining room drinking tea, sometimes drinking almost the whole samovar. They had tea with honey or homemade preserves, and cookies or cherry, or apple pie made from fruit out of our

garden. They talked endlessly about market prices, provisions for the winter, or the right time for pickling cucumbers or cabbage, and about what would make better preserves—honey or sugar.

Maria Ivanovna was a literate and well-read woman, and her husband, a former coal miner, was also a rather literate man. When they married, he left the mines, bought a small lot of land not far from Slavyansk in the village of Bantushevo and started farming and beekeeping, like his father before him. Several years before World War I, when their children were ready to attend school, they moved to Slavyansk. He bought a large house next to ours and built an additional small house in the courtyard. He lived with his family in the big house and rented the small one to the ladies' tailor, Khaykin. During the spring and summer he stayed in the country and farmed, bringing home produce; in the winter he returned home and kept himself busy in the metal trade.

Belichenko was a sullen and terse man and seldom visited his neighbors. But occasionally, in the evening, he would come to sit with my father on a bench beside the gate. Then he talked about news he had read in the newspaper "Yuzhny kray" ("The Southern Country"). For some unknown reason the news he reported was always about faraway places, about what was happening in South America, or in the Philippines and other Southern countries.

It was very strange that he rarely talked about Russia and, if he did, he talked with restraint, expressing his opinions almost casually, saying something like this, "By the way, Gavriyl Daniylovich, Russia needs reforms," or comment, "Our neighbor, Germany, may soon march against Russia." And sometimes he mentioned very cautiously, "Who knows, there might be a revolution in Russia."

My father argued with him hotly on this matter, "You are wrong, Belichenko; this cannot happen! Everything is in order in our Russia. You can see it with your own eyes, how people live in our town. Let's take, for example, our Kharkovsky Street. People work, build houses, educate their children; everyone is dressed well, nobody is hungry, every man is master of his own life. What else does a person need? The town is growing and improving..."

And going to bed, my father used to reassure himself:

"Some reforms maybe, if they are for the better... But, revolution? What for? This is Belichenko's fantasy. He is probably possessed by revolutionary ideas. And all this because he is not attending church. He is an atheist, but he sends his children to church. His wife is a good Christian, and a fine housewife and mother..."

My father could not fall asleep for a long time after those conversations with Belichenko. In his mind he was reviewing his own life and that of his neighbors. The lives of shopkeepers, artisans, small merchants, and tradesmen, who, like himself, had built their economic security upon humble beginnings through years of hard, honest work, perseverance, and frugal living; who had established for themselves and their families a dignified and respectable way of life. The whole length of Kharkovsky Street, where he had lived for forty years, was spread before his eyes. He was witness of its growth.

My father reflected on his own lowly family descent and how well he had done so far in upgrading himself from the son of a peasant to a *myeshchanyn*<sup>3</sup>. And he reasoned with himself:

"Well, as a tailor I did my work well; my reputation grew fast and I became one of

the best tailors in town. The customers appreciated me, the townspeople trusted me, and it was possible to get a bank loan to build our houses. The family is growing, business is thriving, and I have built next to my small house a larger one of white brick. And a few years ago, I built in place of my first small house, a two-story one of red brick. My older son, Nikolay, will be married soon - there will be a place for his family and for my other sons or daughters, if they need it.

"I had, and still have, the boys and young men apprentices to whom I teach my trade, as I was taught in the past. And I have a senior apprentice and a master tailor to help me in the shop. Some of my former apprentices already work on their own and are doing well. Take for example, Arkady, what a nice fellow he was and diligent, too. But Styopa Bolotov, that one never went farther than apprentice, he never wanted to learn, he was a vagabond and, is still a good-for-nothing."

Then his thoughts switched to his family:

"We were fortunate that most of our children survived all their childhood diseases, except Vasya, and little Natasha. Our oldest son, Vasya, died very suddenly of diphtheria when he was in the second preparatory class—the merciful God did not make him suffer to long.

"Little Natasha was born in poor health. It happened sometime after I returned from the Japanese War in 1905. In her short life she remained sickly and never learned to walk. My poor wife took her to many doctors, but no one could find out what was wrong with her. After my wife had burned many candles and recited many prayers in church and at home, God took our little Natasha and placed her among the angels. For one year she was among us, she was surrounded by our love and brought us joy, especially to her sisters, who took care of her and gave her lots of affection.

"All the other children, thanks to God, grew up healthy. All attended school, though not all have graduated yet. Our now oldest son, Kolya, has finished architectural technical school and is already on his own, drafting plans for new homes. Our oldest daughter, Tanya, will soon be going to dental school; the other daughter, Tonya, wants to be a teacher, and still another one, Nyusya, wants to be a doctor. God willing, I will help all of them to get their education, as I did for my oldest son. The two younger sons, Vanya and Shura, are attending boys' secondary schools; the youngest daughter Olya is attending girls' secondary school; and the youngest son, Petya, is still a little boy..."

After reflecting on his own family, my father pondered about the other people he knew:

"I am not the only one who lives like this. The ladies' tailor, Khaikin, who came from a poor Jewish family, also worked hard and has had his rewards. Before he rented a small house from our neighbor Belichenko, and now he has a two-story brick house like mine built on Ekaterinoslavsky Street and has a shop on the ground floor. His son studied music and became a good violinist."

Then he switched his thoughts to other successful people in town:

"My longtime neighbor, Dimitry Kuznetsov, the one who lives past Belichenko's house, has his own blacksmith's shop, and he is a very good master blacksmith. His son lives next to him. He is also a blacksmith, and he also has his own house. At the other end of the street, closer to the center of town, lives the shoemaker, Krasny, who has his own shop and repairs shoes for the whole town. Next to him is the bakery of the Greek, Avanesov; he makes the best bread in town. Further out, there stands the Inn

Rossia and on the corner there is the recently built town bank. Across the street there is another inn, and Kotlyarov's print shop."

His thoughts moved farther from his home:

"At Soborny Square in the center of town, there are many shops and stores full of merchandise and produce: Sidorenko's shoe store, Khristov's fabric store, Rostovtsev's haberdashery shop, and so many others, it's hard to count them all. On the other side of the Square stands Karyakin's hardware shop, and Spivakov's warehouse—filled with wheat, flour, and all kinds of grains and cereals. You can buy as much as you want and from whomever you like. You can bargain over the price and, if you don't like it, go on to the next store! On the corner is the Armenian Gulbenko's grocery store, and on the other corner stands the Armenian Taganesov's Delicatessen, the largest in town."

Then his mind began to remember other good things about his town:

"In the center of Soborny Square stands the Cathedral, where on Saturdays the bell calls the townspeople to vespers. And on Sundays people come from all parts of town and its vicinities. There, the town's families have all their ceremonies performed—christenings for their children, weddings for the young, and funerals for those who have left this world.

"The town has four secondary schools, three for girls and one for boys, and there is also a vocational, a business, and a technical school, and, of course, there are several elementary and parish schools. All families send their children to school. If the family cannot pay the tuition, the town takes care of it.

"Life in town flows calmly, peacefully. As long as I can remember, there have been no riots or killings. Perhaps, every so often there might be some drunken passer-by, who unsettles this peaceful life."

His mind relaxed after these thoughts. And he suddenly concluded that everyone who tried and worked hard was able to live good life in his town:

"And how many different nationalities live in town! Only on Kharkovsky Street alone live Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Armenians, Polish, Greeks and Germans, all right next to each other. On the other side of town, near the River Torets, Bulgarians, who cultivate vegetable gardens have settled, and Gypsies who trade horses.

"In town there are many factories and plants—the famous Kusnyetsov's china plant, a brick plant, a soda plant, Bytkov's salt plant, Smirnov's metallurgical plant, Polyakhov's timber warehouse... There is enough work for everybody. The plant owners and the merchants are making money, tradesmen are prospering, and workers earn good wages too—I know that, because some of them are my customers. We have never had any strikes..."

Then he recalled all the improvements in town:

"All the townspeople already have electric lighting in their homes. There is a club, two movie theaters, and the nice Shelkovichny Park with old Mulberry trees and with a pond next to it; in the winter children and youth go skating on it. In the vicinity there is Kurort, a resort on Salty Lake. People from all parts of Russia come there to have treatments of hot salt baths or salty mud applications to alleviate their rheumatic pains..."

He switched again to the abundance people of this town enjoyed:

"Then, one has only to see what kind of markets are in our town! On Saturday nights farmers bring from nearby villages and khutors (farmsteads) all kinds of produce

for sale. They all come to Soborny Square, where every Sunday there is a farmers' market, and two times a year it hosts big fairs. Then, with squeaking wheels, cart after cart moves along Kharkovsky Street. The farmers bring for sale flour, grain, bread, milk, butter milk, butter, sour cream, farmer's cheese, eggs, and honey; live, slaughtered, and roasted poultry; they pull along cattle and sheep, and carry in cages pigs, geese, and ducks... Good Lord! It is impossible to describe all that they bring in such abundance. It is enough for everybody and for all pocketbooks..."

And again his thoughts returned to his conversation with his neighbors Belichenko and he asked and reasoned with himself:

"Who needs another system? Is it possible that somewhere in the world people live better than we do? I will never believe it. And if the Czar rules over us, it doesn't harm anybody. It has been this way from ancient times. Besides, there are the ministers and Duma - Council of the State. The state needs to be governed, otherwise the cart will fall apart. But revolution! It can't happen! I will never believe that the Russian man could be an enemy to himself. It must be some bitter enemy, who stirs up trouble in the people's minds. Maybe Belichenko is right about one thing,, the Germans, who might start a war with us. God save us all..."

And my father began to pray and to cross himself before falling asleep.

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Kharkovskaya ulitza," [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniakh* [Nikita Khrushchev in My Memoirs] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967), trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

3. Member of a lower middle class, also called petty bourgeois.

## Learning To Be A Teacher

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

On the fifth of June, 1913, I graduated with a silver medal award from the First Women's Gymnasium of Slavyansk<sup>1</sup>, the secondary school for girls that my sisters and I had attended. I was eighteen years old. I made up my mind to become a teacher and enrolled in a one-year course of specialized studies that was offered at our gymnasium. I graduated from that course on the fifth of June, 1914 and received a certificate<sup>2</sup> qualifying me as an elementary school teacher of Russian and French and as an in-home tutor.

My father had a good customer, an officer by the name of Stotsky. He moved with his family to Slavyansk from Saint Petersburg, where his wife used to be a French teacher. My father asked her to talk to me and evaluate my skills. She was impressed with my French, and at her advice, I decided to specialize further and qualify to teach in a gymnasium.

During that summer I tutored Madam Stotsky's son in Russian. In exchange, I

took from her advanced French lessons in order to prepare myself for the entrance exams at the Lochvedskaya Scolon Courses Of Modern Foreign Languages in Petrograd (as former Saint Petersburg was now renamed). Madam Stotsky highly recommended these Courses that were well known throughout the country.

In the fall of 1914, I departed for the city of Petrograd with money my father and my older sister Tanya provided me. She graduated from the gymnasium one year ahead of me and was now working locally at Kotlyarov's Print Shop and saving money for her next year of study at a dental school in the city of Kharkov.

Madam Stotsky had given me a letter of recommendation and the address of one family she knew well, the family of a very wealthy French businessman who had his own company in the city of Petrograd. I departed in the fall hoping to pass the entrance examination that was required before being accepted to the Courses.

According to Madam Stotsky's instructions, upon my arrival at the Alexandrovsky railroad station, I hired a *vanika*, a coachman with a small carriage. This was the cheapest method of transportation from the station to the city and the most practical, considering that he would bring me and a big basket with my belongings directly to the door at Number 3, Gorokhovoy Street. He drove me down the entire length of Nyevsky Prospect and turned onto the street close to Palace Square, where the Czar's palace was.

I handed the lady of the house the letter from Madam Stotsky. But she had been already notified that I was coming and was expecting my arrival. This Madam spoke only French and behaved with an air of great importance. She gave orders to the maids to take care of all my needs. They fed me right away and gave me a separate room. In it was a huge bed covered with a goose-feather quilt. For about a week I stayed at their house; they fed me and their servants took care of me until I found a place to live. The Courses were not far from there, in the center of the city on Nikolayevsky Street, a street that ran perpendicular to Nevsky Prospect.

Finding a room to rent was a very difficult task for students. Since I started at the Courses immediately upon my arrival, I had to search for a room late in the afternoon after my lessons ended. I decided to look first along streets located not too far from the Courses and began my search by walking down Nikolayevsky Street. I was looking for green papers that would be attached to the gates of the buildings if there were rooms within for rent. After awhile, I found a green paper stating that a room was available on the second floor and that the stairs to its entrance were in the courtyard. As soon as I entered the gate, a huge dog jumped on me, placing his furry paws on my shoulders and barking in my face. I was struck with fear and was able only to whisper, "Doggy... Doggy, please..." A woman on the balcony above called the dog off and invited me into her apartment. To calm me down, she gave me a glass of water. But I was so scared that I refused to look at the room.

The next day I went searching on Vladimirovsky Street. There I found a very small, narrow room with a single bed, a chair, and a small table with a carafe of water on it. A Polish woman rented the room to me on the strict condition that there would be no visits from other students, which I agreed to sincerely. The place was convenient to the Courses; to get there I could take the streetcar that ran down Nevsky Prospect.

One afternoon, only a few weeks after I rented the room, the landlady was waiting for me at the door with a puzzled look on her face. She led me to my room. I

saw a huge basket on my bed. Sitting on the chair was a girl from my gymnasium, a very nasty and unpleasant person with whom I never had a friendly relationship. I found out that my mother had given her my address thinking to do me a favor by having a friend from my hometown to stay with me. The landlady did not allow her to stay and sent her away.

A short time after this incident, my landlady again showed me to my room while reproaching me for having visitors. I looked at the two women sitting on my bed and told her, "I don't even know who they are." This time my mother made for me another surprise by giving my address to one of her acquaintances, Mussya Skorkina, who in turn passed it on to a distant relative living in another town. The woman was bringing her daughter to the city to study and needed a place to stay until they could find her a room. This time the landlady told me to "get out."

The mother and her daughter, Zhenya, had another reference to a person in the workers' hamlet on the Vyborgsky side of the city, which was not far from her school, and they found her a room there. Since it was not easy to find another room immediately I had no other choice - they convinced me to move in with Zhenya.

I lived there for the rest of the school year, though it was very far from my Courses and it took me a long time to travel there each day, especially during the northern winter that was much colder there than in the Ukraine. I had to walk to Kalininsky Bridge, where I would take the streetcar going to Nevsky Prospect. There I had to get out at Gostinny Dvor and transfer to another streetcar going along Nevsky Prospect and get off on Nikolayevsky Street, and from there I walked the rest of the way to my Courses. I remember one windy day I got on the streetcar at Gostinny Dvor, and all the passengers were staring at me. Finally, one woman came up to me and told me that my cheek was frozen, and she began to warm it up with her mitten.

Zhenya was a nice girl and we got along very well. She received lots of packages from her mother containing dried fruits that we chewed constantly while doing our homework assignments.

The eyeglasses I still wore from Slavyansk were so out of focus that I saw everything as if it was in a fog. Finally, I decided to have an eye doctor in the city check my eyes. I got new *pince-nez* eyeglasses that were kept in place by a spring that gripped the bridge of my nose. It took me awhile to get used to them. Straight lines looked curved, and I was so insecure when walking that people tried to help me, assuming that I was almost blind.

But what a sensation I felt when I finally got used to them! Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I actually saw the world as it really was. Before, all people seemed to be so pretty to me. Now, I found that what I saw was not always beautiful. The faces of passers-by acquired new life and meaning. Now I saw them clearly and as they were—some, old with wrinkled faces but pleasant and smiling; others, with wrinkles frozen in hardened, stone-like expressions staring indifferently at everyone; still others, had ugly features and looked sad or bashful; some, were covered with scars or just had intimidating and threatening expressions; some, of an indefinite age, were insignificantly plain and colorless; while others were young, full of joy, and radiant with life.

Now I could also see, instead of the milky-gray walls of buildings along the streets, the gracious palaces of the city in all their classical beauty, with all their

architectural adornments. And I could finally see and admire all the luxurious displays windows in the famous shops on Nevsky Prospect. I was so fascinated by their splendor that I often forgot about the time needed to get home before dark.

I had two other girlfriends, both students at the Courses, who entered into my life in Petrograd. One was Manya, a local resident who lived not far from the school. Both of her parents worked. I used to walk with her after lessons, and on our way to her home we would stop at the bakery to buy ready-to-bake dough and ingredients for sago, a kind of starch made from the piths of palm trees used in making puddings or pie fillings. Then my friend would bake a pie, which we shared with her teenage brother, or sometimes with her boyfriend, who was a student at the Medical Military Academy. Occasionally, the three of us went to Academy Park, where we could rent skates and skate on the pond with other students from the Academy and also from many other schools and Courses offered in that city.

The other student, Nadya, who befriended me was a companion to a rich old lady and lived with her in a huge house. Nadya loved to go to the theater and always knew what and where something interesting was playing and how to get tickets that were affordable to students. On the evenings when we went to the theater, she invited me to supper and for an overnight stay. One of our most memorable evenings was when we saw the ballet "Talisman" at the Maryinsky Theater. It was a benefit performance by the ballerina Ksheshynskaya and the famous dancer Vladimirov. My friend obtained tickets that were directly distributed to students at the palace where the famous ballerina lived.

Another memorable event occurred when she was lucky enough to get students' tickets to the *Narodny Dom*, a popular theater, where the famous Russian bass singer, Shalyapin, performed in the opera "Faust." Students could purchase inexpensive, non numbered tickets for the gallery. In order to get the best seats, students had to arrive very early and wait until the large doors opened. Then they would all run up the wide, steep stairs trying to find good seats. That evening we were lucky to get seats in the first row of the gallery—not only could we hear, but we could also see the performance of Shalyapin. What a voice he had! It was an unforgettable experience.

Petrograd at that time was a center of learning, and students came there from all parts of Russia. Most students belonged to fellowship groups named after their province. I did not belong to any specific group, but I went to many cultural events organized by several groups. All meetings were open to any student who wanted to attend. I remember very vividly the evening I attended a lecture organized by the students from Chernigov belonging to a Chernigovsky Fellowship group, where the young poet, Mayakovsky, who was a sensation at that time, read his poems. He made his onstage entrance with his back to the audience. He wore an unusual, strange outfit—a wide, long black mantle with large sleeves. When he recited, he didn't look at the audience, but somewhere beyond it, turning to one or the other side of the stage looking up, at the ceiling or down on the floor.

I liked the student life and I liked my professors—they were all very good; especially excellent was Professor Polyvanov, who taught Phonetics. He captivated student audiences during beautiful lectures that he filled with melodious, phonetic sounds. I still remember that during the examination he praised me for my ability in pronunciation and gave me a very good grade. Another very remarkable professor was

Monsieur Dean, whose lectures on World Literature were sprinkled with colorful recitations from the classics.

In the summer of 1915, the war with Germany had already begun. Before I went home for summer vacation, there were rumors in the workers' hamlet on the Vyborsky side of the city about the unrest caused by revolutionaries and their sympathizers. There were numerous strikes, and workers gathered for secret meetings. Workers in the hamlet talked about many political ideas that I could not understand. One thing was certain, life in the city was becoming insecure. Therefore, when I went home for summer vacation, I decided not to return to Petrograd but to find another school closer to home.

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1. From a Certificate, "Attestat", 1913, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
  2. From a Certificate, "Attestat", 1914, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## Students In Kharkov

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

In the fall of 1915, my sister, Tanya, was to begin her study at the dental school in Kharkov. Since I decided not to return to Petrograd because of the unrest in that city, Madam Stotsky suggested that in Kharkov there were very well known M. A. Stats Pedagogical Courses Of Modern Languages, so I enrolled there that school year. Tanya had worked for almost two years and saved some of the money needed to pay for her studies. Our father financed the rest of our living expenses and tuition. We were expected to live modestly on our budget without sacrificing essential needs.

Both our schools were located in the center of the city. The Dental School was on Sumskaya Street and the Courses Of Modern Languages was on the corner of Sumskaya and Mironosetsky, where Mironosetsky Square was.

We found a room somewhat distant from the city's center because rent there was less expensive. My sister also found a girl to share our room who was enrolled in her school. Our roommate, Lyudmila, was a very pretty blonde girl from a Greek family that came from the town of Taganrog on the western shore of the Azov Sea. Our landlady who sublet to us the room was a Siberian woman, and she lived in the apartment with her domestic servant, Ulyasha.

Travel to and from our schools by streetcar took a long time, and so we did not have much time left for recreation. By the time we got home from school it was already evening. After supper we were busy studying, and in the mornings we had to get up early in order to be on time at our schools.

Tanya, as an older daughter, had learned to cook well at home; she was especially good at baking all kinds of cookies and cakes. So, we entrusted her with our money and with the preparation of meals. We pitched in with the other chores. She then

gave us from the kitty our lunch money and money for other occasional expenses.

On cold winter evenings we shared the events of the day with each other, and I was the one who entertained them with fortune telling. I predicted the future with cards, the trick that I learned as a young girl from my paternal grandmother, Babushka Anna, when she came from the village to visit us in my father's home. I was not an experienced fortune teller but I was a good actress with lots of imagination and always told them what each of them wanted to hear, "The cards are showing that you soon meet an attractive young man. The two of you would fall madly in love with each other!" My reputation as a fortuneteller improved considerably when I predicted that Ulyasha's husband would come home soon, and he, indeed, came home in a few days after that. Of course, he was recovering in a hospital after being wounded on the Front, and she had been expecting him any day anyway, so that was not hard to foretell from the cards!

The three years I spent in Kharkov were less eventful than the single year I lived in Petrograd. And the signs of revolution were slow to undermine the lives of the citizens of Kharkov.

The students at our schools were mostly girls from Kharkovsky province and from the city. Most of their families were from the lower ranks of government bureaucracy, small merchants, shopkeepers, and tradesmen. They had established a comfortable way of life and financial security for themselves and their families. They built that way of life with years of perseverance and honest work, and their loyalty to the Czar and Russia remained strong. Any disruption of the established order in the country meant a threat to their way of life and an uncertain future.

In the beginning, the events that happened in large cities far away in the North of Russia seemed a remote and most likely a temporary phenomenon to us young women students. It was something that could never reach us and disturb our way of life. For a period of time we continued to live our normal everyday student lives, almost entirely insulated from what was happening in the rest of the country.

Kharkov was a small city, compared to Petrograd; it did not offer much contact with students from other schools, and there were no specific cultural or recreational activities for students. We had a few friends whom we met on occasion. My sister Tanya's girlfriend from gymnasium, Shura Pankrat'yeva, and her brother Vassya, who studied at a technical school, visited us often. I had two other friends, both older than I. One friend owned a ladies' hat shop located in the big new building almost across the street from the Courses. She took care of the customers and all the business affairs and her sister, who was a very skillful modiste, created beautiful hats.

I had known this woman previously in Slavyansk, when she visited her gentleman friend, a Polish man, who rented an apartment from my father on the second floor of our white brick house. This same gentleman had financed her hat shop and a nice apartment. The gentleman friend visited her quite often, both for business and for pleasure. He usually brought her huge bags of candies and ordered all kinds of cakes, which she shared with me after he was gone. She was short and plump, but an attractive woman, always well-dressed and wearing fashionable hats. She had some other admirers and enjoyed going out with them, especially to the theaters.

When she found out that I was studying to become a French teacher, she asked me to give her lessons in exchange for lunch or dinner, which was cooked by her servant. The food was well prepared and very good; especially tasty were the *pirozhky*

with meat or other fillings, they reminded me of those made by my mother. I soon understood that she was not truly interested in learning French—she really wanted a companion. Occasionally I stayed overnight at her home when she invited me for supper and then to the theater, where she always found somebody to socialize with. By keeping her company, I was able to save some money from my allowance, which came in handy for other expenses.

The other older friend was a student at the Courses and she lived in a big apartment not far from there. I remember only that her last name was Antakolenko. She was from a rich family, well educated, with very refined manners, and was an aspiring poet. To hide her age, she used a lot of makeup, which women did not commonly use back then. Sometimes she invited me to visit her after school. Usually we had supper and then she played piano and read her poetry to me, as she wanted to share it with someone who could appreciate it. Influenced by her, I started to write poetry, too. Sometimes she organized evening dance parties at her home for us students and served refreshments of pastries and tea. She also invited some of our teachers to those parties.

That was when I fell in love for the first time—with my teacher of logic, lecturer Mezhlauk. He was by nationality a Latvian and was a somewhat eccentric young man. He had a peculiar habit, upon entering the classroom, of pulling out his neatly folded handkerchief and wiping his lips.

I liked him very much, I was falling in love with him, but could not figure out how to let him know about it. One day, when I had saved some money, I went to the florist and bought a potted flowering white lilac. I paid the *Red Hat*, as the errand-boys who wore red hats were called and gave him my teacher's address, but I did not put my name on the card. At an interval of a few days I sent twice flowers to Mezhlauk. The third time, I gave him the name of our roommate, Lyudmila, so his reply could be mailed to our post office box. His answer was very short: "I have already received three plants from my kind friend, but I don't know who she is..." After that I stayed behind several times after his lectures to ask him some questions on logic. Finally he gave me one of his books to read, and in it I found his photograph. I kept it.

One day my poetess friend gave an evening dance party. The young women were required to wear men's clothing. I borrowed my costume from Vassya, our friend Shura's brother. Our teacher, Mezhlauk, was also invited, but he was late, and I was disappointed because there were very few men at the party and the women had to dance with each other. But finally, my white knight arrived and asked me to dance with him.

At the end of the evening he asked me how I would be getting home. And, when I told him that I traveled on the streetcar, he suggested that he would take the *vanyka* and would accompany me home. We had a nice evening ride in the carriage. He came into our apartment and met my sister Tanya and our roommate, Lyudmila.

Shortly after that he was called up for military service and was sent to the Western Front where the Russian Army was defending against the German invasion. I had received only one letter from him, in which he notified me that he was wounded and was writing from a hospital. I wrote him back but never received an answer. Later I read in the newspaper that he died after being wounded on the front. Thus, my first romance had a very tragic end.

The course of study at the Courses of Modern Languages was very comprehensive and, in order to succeed, students had to put in many hours of intensive homework. During my three years of study, I had to take the required subjects of Psychology; Logic; Pedagogy; History of Education; School Hygiene; French Grammar; Contemporary and Classic Literature and History; and Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages. In addition, I had several elective subjects that included Latin and the History of World Literature.

At the end of the three years of study—I received one year of credits for my studies in Petrograd—in May, 1918, I took and passed the required examination given by the Government Commission. I received a Certificate<sup>1</sup> giving me the title of Secondary School Teacher of French, which I would hold after I had completed the six months of required supervised teaching in a state or community secondary school. I decided to do my supervised teaching in Slavyansk and departed for home.

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1. *Svidyetyelstvo* - A Certificate of Pedagogical Courses, May 31, 1918. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy

By Olga Gladky Verro

As Remembered by Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky,  
Nikolay Nikolayevich Berezhnoy, and Vladimyr Nikolayevich Berezhnoy

The oldest son of Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy, Nikolay, was born in 1893 in Slavyansk.<sup>1</sup> At home they called him for short Kolya. Being older than his four sisters, Tanya, Tonya, Nyusya, and Olya<sup>2</sup>, and his three brothers, Shura, Vanya, and Petya<sup>3</sup>, he didn't play childhood games with them. During the years he was growing up, as a boy and as a teenager, or later when he was a student at technical school, he had a circle of friends his own age with whom he kept company instead of his younger brothers and sisters.

Gavriyl Daniylovich was very fond of his oldest son and, being a wise father, guided him, instilling in him a drive to further his education in a professional career, for which Kolya had shown an inclination. Therefore, after Kolya had successfully graduated from the town's School For Boys, he enrolled in Technical School where he specialized in architectural engineering.

His father was very proud that his son was successful in school. By the time Kolya had graduated from Technical School, Gavriyl Daniylovich had remodeled the previously rented space on the first floor of their red brick house into an apartment for Kolya and he also equipped one of the rooms as an architectural studio. Since Gavriyl Daniylovich had several building contractors among his best customers, he asked them to try out his son's skills by giving him small orders to help him get started. At the same time, he gave his son the advice to start with very moderate fees and do his best work

in order to establish his professional reputation.

Under these favorable conditions, Kolya began to earn his living drafting architectural plans for local building contractors who, from the beginning, were impressed with his high quality work and soon gave him more complex orders. They often praised Kolya's work to Gavriyl Daniylovich who felt great satisfaction at his son's achievements. He was even able sometimes to find time out of his busy day at the tailor shop to visit the construction sites of some of the homes being built according to his son's plans.

At that time, besides conscientiously pursuing his professional career, Kolya, like most young men his age, was actively dating the young girls in town without becoming seriously involved with any of them. In that small, provincial town everybody knew everybody, either personally or by reputation. And Kolya was considered to be a very eligible bachelor, not only because he was a good-looking young man, but also because he was a desirable prospect for a husband—he already had a promising professional career and a secure income with which to provide a comfortable living for a wife and family. Those qualifications were appreciated not only by the young girls but also by their parents, who allowed their daughters to flirt with Kolya, to invite him to visit them in their homes, and to date him casually in hopes that it would lead to a more serious relationship, and perhaps engagement and marriage.

Kolya was an attractive young man. He had some traits of both his mother and his father. He was of average height and slender build, with his father's wavy, dark brown hair and high forehead. From his mother he inherited small facial features, a small mouth, and a light complexion. But what made him stand out from other young men of his social circle in town were his impeccable and fashionable clothes. As a master tailor, his father could buy at discount the best wool fabrics from local merchants and then tailor outfits that fit Kolya to perfection. So, Kolya sported both fabrics and workmanship that only the rich men could afford.

Not far from the Berezhnoy house on Kharkovsky Street lived a well-to-do family that had their origins in the impoverished nobility. They had a very beautiful daughter whom they educated according to the traditions of their lost rank. She studied in a highly prestigious school for young ladies in a big city and came home only during school vacations. For this reason, in Slavyansk she was nicknamed *Studyentka*<sup>4</sup>. Being out of town most of the year, she didn't have any close friends in Slavyansk and rarely participated in its social and youth activities, except for attending Sunday and holiday church services with her parents.

One day, when she was walking to church, Kolya noticed that she had suddenly changed from a pretty-looking little schoolgirl into a beautiful maiden. He was so impressed with her refined manners and her elegant clothes in the latest big city fashion that he could not take his eyes off her during church service. After church, he followed her at a distance when she went home with her parents. He was fascinated as he watched her walk with the dignity of a lady; she held her head high and maintained a perfect balance of her slender and graceful figure. Everything about her distinguished her from the other provincial young girls that Kolya knew, and he instantly fell passionately in love with this mysterious maiden.

He stopped dating all the other girls he had been flirting with and began to court intensively the beautiful and mysterious *Studyentka*. She gracefully accepted his

attention, seemingly with the approval of her parents. Vacation time passed very quickly, and impatient Kolya rushed up to propose to her before she left for school again. But she absolutely rebuffed the idea of marriage for reasons Kolya never told anybody. When she didn't accept his proposal, he was devastated by her rejection.

A few days later, as he was walking home immersed in a terrible mood, he encountered Katya<sup>5</sup> Grechko on Kharkovsky Street near her father's inn. Katya was one of several young girls Kolya had dated on-and-off before he fell under the spell of *Studentka*. Kolya was so absorbed with brooding over his broken heart that he almost passed Katya without greeting her. She was the one who stopped him with a cheerful greeting and asked what had happened to him, why hadn't he come by to see her for such a long time.

Katya's lively voice and her playful kitten's touch on his hand had a soothing effect on Kolya and, with her close to him, he suddenly felt at ease, comfortable and relaxed. As had happened many times before, when he was disappointed or tired of other girls that he dated, Katya would take him back with open arms and make him feel wanted. And he felt happy and content in her company. Katya had always known that Kolya dated other girls, but this had never become a problem. Their relationship always remained friendly, allowing him to return to her every time one of his relationships ended.

The same thing also happened this time, after his infatuation with *Studyentka*. In one evening, with her joyous and outgoing personality Katya was able to console Kolya and allow him to lick the wounds of his recent humiliation at being in an unsuccessful courtship. And right there, as they walked up and down Kharkovsky Street, Kolya quickly made a decision and asked Katya to marry him. Katya immediately and without hesitation accepted his proposal, as she had been patiently expecting it for a long time.

After his passionate and intense courtship of the beautiful *Studyentka*, Kolya surprised everyone, his parents, family, and friends, by suddenly announcing that he and Katya had decided to marry and wanted to have their wedding as soon as possible. However, Kolya's decision to marry Katya was probably not as sudden as it seemed to others; for him, it was probably the natural outcome of their long and steady relationship. And for Katya, it was a patiently expected proposal that she had dreamed about for a long time.

Katya was from a typical provincial, petty bourgeois<sup>6</sup> family that raised her to accept the traditional woman's role and place in society according to the customs prevailing at that time. She had just graduated from a gymnasium but had no intention of studying any further for a specific career as did some young girls, including Kolya's three sisters, who pursued careers already at the beginning of the twentieth century. Instead, Katya followed the traditional role of women of those days; she wanted to find the right husband, have a home, children, and be a good housewife and mother.

Katya was an attractive, pleasant-looking, young girl with well-proportioned facial features, plump rosy cheeks, big round eyes and long brown hair parted in the middle, combed softly over her ears and then rolled into a bun at the nape of her neck. She was of average height and was somewhat plump all over. Her large, well-shaped bosom stood high on her chest. Altogether, she was the picture of a healthy-looking, fully developed young woman in the prime of her life. She was always well dressed, according to the provincial fashions of young girls her age. But most of all she was jolly,

good-natured, and carefree.

Katya was the daughter of the local innkeeper, Iosyf Iosyfovich Grechko, who owned several inns in town. One of his inns was only a block and half away from the Berezhnoy house, toward the center of town, a few houses from the corner of Zhelyenodorozhnaya<sup>7</sup> Street on the other side of the railroad tracks. When Katya was young, her family lived next to the inn on the upper floor of the Butkovs' house. She liked to tell the story of how she fell out of the second story window when she was about three years old and the funny answer she gave when she was asked how she fell, "Just straight down."

From the time her mother died when Katya was about seven years old, she lived with her aunt Varya<sup>8</sup> and uncle Misha<sup>9</sup> in their house located in the direction of Kurort not far from the local railroad station, Shnurkovskaya. Aunt Varya was Katya's mother's sister. She and her husband, Misha, raised Katya, while her older brother, Boris, stayed with their father until he was accepted at military school.

Aunt Varya was unable to have her own children, but her husband succeeded in having a daughter outside of marriage. Her name was Polya<sup>10</sup>, and they had adopted her immediately after birth. Polya was an unruly and difficult girl. Even her father could not easily make her to be obedient. Aunt Varya always intervened between her husband and his daughter, for he often had the tendency of punishing Polya more harshly than she deserved. Although Aunt Varya tried to give Polya as much affection as she gave Katya, she couldn't help being more attached to her good-natured niece who reciprocated her love.

Katya was younger than Kolya—she was about his sisters' age, but when she was still in school they didn't have much contact with her because she attended another gymnasium located near her aunt's home. When she was older, Katya was at her father's Inn, where she stayed long hours during the day and also into the evening. She helped to take care of the guests and, when needed, to prepare and serve their meals. This gave her an opportunity to learn good housekeeping and cooking skills and to meet people of all ages. It was at this time that Kolya often dated her and grew fond of her.

After the wedding, Katya went to live at Kolya's place in his father's red brick house. Shortly after their marriage Katya became pregnant, and on December 3, 1916, their first son was born in Slavyansk. They named him after his father, Nikolay, but in the family they affectionately called him Kotyk.

Gavriyl Daniylovich and Natalia Iosyfovna felt a great joy at the birth of their first grandchild. Gavriyl Daniylovich used to put Kotyk on his big tailor's table and allow him to play with a box of buttons, making his five-year-old son, Petya, jealous of the attention his father gave to his grandson.

Natalia Iosyfovna appreciated Katya, as she thought she was a good wife for her son Kolya and praised her for being an excellent cook and housewife. But she was disappointed and complained often to her husband and her daughters that her daughter-in-law, Katya, did not show as much affection to her and Gavriyl Daniylovich and, in general, to the Berezhnoy family, as she showed her relatives, Aunt Varya and Uncle Misha, with whom she maintained a very close attachment. However, during the time they lived close together, Natalia Iosyfovna and Katya maintained a peaceful relationship and did not quarrel.

For a few years Nikolay worked steadily for local building contractors, and he had

plenty of orders that allowed him to provide for his family's needs. In addition, while working for the local contractors, he received a lot of practical experience in the actual construction of homes and commercial buildings. However, remaining in Slavyansk did not offer him immediate opportunity for professional growth as a building engineer, so he began to search in larger towns for an employment with large, reputable building contractors. He found such a contractor in the town of Taganrog and moved there with his family. There, two partnering architects needed additional help with their large building contracts. They were very happy with Nikolay's work and rewarded him accordingly.

Nikolay's sister, Tonya, visited him in Taganrog and was very impressed that her brother was able to afford a beautiful apartment and furnish it tastefully with good quality furnishings in such a short time. During her visit, Tonya appreciated Katya as a good cook who served tasty, abundant meals and desserts. Katya said that she hadn't prepared anything special to treat her visiting sister-in-law and that the food she served was just the regular meals that they had every day. When Tonya got home from her visit she told her mother and father, "Kolya has found well-paid employment there; it allows him to live as a truly prosperous professional man." And she added, "He also has found a good wife who takes good care of the home and family."

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1. Nikolay Nikolayevich Berezhnoy and Vladimir Nikolayevich Berezhnoy [also spelled Wladimir Bereschnoy in Canada] the sons of Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy, notes of telephone communications and audiocassette [in Russian], trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1999, (Toronto, ONT, September, 1993), private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. Tatyana, Antonina, Anna, and Olga.

3. Alexander, Ivan and Pyetr.

4. Feminine spelling in Russian of the word "student."

5. Nickname for Yekateryna.

6. Lower middle class.

7. Railroad Street.

8. Nickname for Varvara.

9. Nickname for Mikhail.

10. Nickname for Pavlina.

## The Origins Of the Gladky Family

As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

The origins of the Gladky family can be traced to the village of Alexeyevka in the Alexeyevsky rural district, of the Bakhmut provincial district, that was then under the jurisdiction of the Ekaterinoslavsky hrovince in southern Russia.

Alexeyevka was a village where the land belonged not to a landlord, but to the free peasants. A long time ago when the borderlands of Russia called *okraina*, the outer region of the country,<sup>1</sup> were subject to frequent invasions by the various neighboring

tribes, the Crown was interested in establishing the stability of the region by populating it with loyal subjects. The ancestors of peasant families in Alexeyevka were sent there from Russia as free peasants, not as serfs belonging to any landowner. In reward for settling along the country's borders, they received large tracts of land from the Crown.

From the time the free peasants settled in Alexeyevka, they worked for themselves; they tilled the soil and cultivated in all kinds of crops: wheat, rye, oats, millet, corn, and sunflowers. The rich soil called chernozem, or "black earth", characteristic of southern Russia, provided plentiful crops and the peasants lived in prosperity there.

Ownership of the land in that region passed from father to sons by subdivision. Because of the generous size of the original parcels of allotted land, several generations later all the families of Alexeyevka still had large parcels that could be subdivided and passed to several future generations. Around their cottages the peasants cultivated big vegetable and fruit gardens and in their barns they kept cows, pigs and all kinds of poultry—chickens, ducks, and geese. The peasants were not only self-sufficient in grains, produce, sunflower oil, meat, and dairy products, they also took an abundance of them to the regional market in Bakhmut, and the government collected its share of the grain in tollage from them.

Each family had several horses which were needed in order to perform their farm chores: plowing the fields; hauling crops, hay and straw; and transporting grains, produce, meat and poultry to the market. All the families in the village of Alexeyevka were well provided for. Year-round their pantries, earth cellars, barns, haylofts, and woodsheds were full. But they worked hard to achieve it.

Since everyone in the village had their own land, they didn't use hired farmhands. Instead, all members in each extended family worked together, taking turns working the fields for each individual family. Men and women had well-defined, specific tasks; the youth worked alongside adults, and children started very young to give a helping hand. During the peak of planting and harvesting seasons, everyone worked from dawn to dusk until all the seeds were sown or all the crops were harvested in each family's field.

When an illness or other misfortune occurred in their own or in a neighbor's family, the others in the village pitched in to help for as long as it was needed. Widows, orphans, and the elderly were also taken care of by their extended families. In this way, the villagers protected and maintained the prosperity of each family and of the whole village for generations.

Because it was a prosperous village, Alexeyevka had a nice church that was dutifully attended by all peasant families on Sundays and holidays. And, as was customary in those days, the church was the center of village social life and the repository of registries of marriages, births and deaths. The clergyman also gave lessons to the peasant boys, teaching them to read the Bible and New Testament. All fathers sent their sons to him at least for as long as it took them to learn all the prayers.

Ownership of the land; the economic security of their families; the thriving community, and their close ties with their extended families kept many generations of the original settlers from moving away from Alexeyevka. There were so many families with the same surname that the peasants had to invent a way to distinguish themselves. In addition to their first, patronymic, and family surnames, they were also given a distinct nickname that often referred to a physical or behavioral characteristic or some

other peculiar trait.

Among the original families that long time ago settled in the village of Alexeyevka was a family with the surname of Gladky. The Gladky's became a large extended family and many had not only the same family name but also the same patronymic and first names, which prompted the addition of the nicknames.

In the first half of the 1800's in Alexeyevka lived the free peasant Timofey Gladky, nicknamed Trigubenko, which meant "triple lips." This distinctive family trait passed from generation to generation with somebody in the family having very wide, protruding lips. Timofey tilled the soil and worked the land as all peasants in the village did. It is known that he had a family, a wife and several children. However, very little of his personal or family life was known to future generations of Gladkys who descended from Timofey's son Makar, who moved from the village early in his life and maintained very little contact with his original family.

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1. The spelling of *okraina* with the passing of time was changed to *ukraina*, and later the name *Ukraina* was given to the whole Southern region of Russia.

## Makar Timofeyevich Gladky

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

My grandfather, Makar Timofeyevich Gladky, was born in 1825 in the village Alexeyevka, in the Bakhmut district of Ekaterinoslavsky province in southern Russia. His father, Timofey Gladky, was a free peasant who owned and cultivated a large parcel of land that he had inherited from his father. From an early age Makar worked alongside his father, mother, and brothers and sisters in the fields, as was customary in those days in peasant families. In the winter months his father allowed him to attend lessons given at the church by the *Batyushka*, where he learned prayers and how to read Holy Scriptures.

In 1846, Makar was drafted into military service and served the full term for a soldier. Very little is known about his life in Alexeyevka, his childhood, his brothers and sisters, or about his life as a soldier, because Makar was not a talkative man and didn't share much about his past with his children or grandchildren. What is known about his family comes mostly from the recollections of his sons and grandsons who on rare occasions visited the relatives in the village of Alexeyevka.

When Makar came home in 1866, after twenty years of military service, he had fallen out of the habit and training of farming, and so moved away from his native village. With the passing of time, he lost close contact with the rest of the family that remained in the village.

Makar Timofeyevich Gladky took the opportunity offered to men discharged from military service to be placed in a civil service on the government jobs. He was hired by

the Southern Railway as a switchman for the railway switch-point at the station of Nikitovka. The station was located not at a great distance from his native village of Alexeyevka, and about twenty-five miles from the district town of Bakhmut.

In the network of the Southern Railway, the station of Nikitovka was a large junction for several major railway lines. There, trains passed from the far North—from Saint Petersburg and Moscow—to the South, to the Caucasus—and had connections there with trains going East and West. Two main lines went from Kharkov—one of them, the North-Donetsky Line, went through Liman, and the other one, the Southern Line, went through Slavyansk to Lozovaya. From there it branched off to still another line going to Militopol and Crimea. Other lines went to Ocheretyno, Papasnaya and Rostov-on-Don, and from there connected to more lines going to Taganrog and to the Caucasus. Besides the main lines there were local routes, one of which went to the hamlet of Mercury Mines.

Adjoining the station of Nikitovka was a workers' hamlet of the same name. It was inhabited by workers in the dolomite and cement plants that were located on the far side of the hamlet away from the railroad station. On one side of the hamlet that led toward the fields, there was a steam mill that ground grain for all neighboring villages.

Makar Timofeyevich's job was not a complicated one, but it required self-discipline, responsibility, and concentration on specific tasks. His job was to take care of one railway switch-point. He stayed on duty for eight hours in a tiny wooden cabin that had only room for a wooden bench, a small iron stove with its pipe sticking out of a windowpane, and a wide windowsill that served him as a table. He was responsible for maintaining the railway switch in good working order, for keeping it well greased with a heavy black oil, or *mazut*, that made the heavy switch lever easier to shift. The switch lever held the rails when they were moved from one track to another. Makar Timofeyevich had to move the switch manually according to schedule or upon special instructions from the Stationmaster. He needed to know the meaning of all railroad signals made with signal flags and signal horns, as well as the procedures of giving instructions to and receiving them from locomotive engineers.

The job was sometimes lonely, but it fit well the character of Makar Timofeyevich's, who by nature was not a talkative man and didn't mind working alone. Still, exchanging greetings and news with locomotive engineers and the conductors of passing trains brightened his workday. And occasionally he had a chance to talk with the crews of freight trains as they waited on the service tracks for a passenger train to move ahead of them on its scheduled time.

Close to the railway station, along the rail tracks, on land belonging to the Southern Railway, stretched rows of apartment houses built for railway workers and employees. Like all Southern Railway workers of lower rank, Makar Timofeyevich received, rent free, one very large room in one of these apartment houses. The room had a built-in brick stove and served both as a kitchen and a bedroom. And, like all railway workers and employees, he also had other free benefits: coal and wood for heating and cooking; petroleum for lighting; winter and summer uniforms; and some free train tickets.

Makar Timofeyevich inherited many physical traits from his Gladky ancestors. He was taller than average but was not as broad-shouldered as one would expect for his size. He had a natural dark complexion, dark brown eyes and hair.

After twenty years of military service in which a soldier's appearance was prescribed by regulations, he got used to it and didn't change it in his civilian life. He kept his short soldier's haircut and plainly trimmed beard and moustache. He also maintained a straight posture and soldier's gait.

As a railroad worker, he wore a railway uniform specific to his service job of switchman. It consisted of a black suit and cap, both made of wool broadcloth in the winter and cotton twill in the summer. Both uniforms had distinctive red piping, a badge on their collars and a cockade on their caps to indicate rank.

After settling into his job, Makar Timofeyevich decided that it was time for him to find the right woman and get married.

## Makar Timofeyevich's Marriage

As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

When Makar Timofeyevich Gladky decided to get married, he didn't go to his village to choose a peasant girl but began instead to travel on his days off to the town of Bakhmut in his search for the right woman. It didn't take him too long to meet Yelena Daniylovna (no one in the family remembered her maiden name). Although Yelena Daniylovna was considerably younger than he was, right from their first meeting she evaluated Makar Timofeyevich as a good candidate for marriage—he had a secure railroad job and was submissive to her whims.

Compared to her husband, Yelena Daniylovna seemed short, though she was only slightly less than average height. Her long, straight, dark brown hair was parted in the middle, combed back and twisted into a tight knot held in place with many small hairpins. She wore the plain clothes customary for folkswomen living in a small provincial town. They consisted of dark, long, gathered skirts, plain blouses made of cotton fabrics with small colorful, floral prints, and a light kerchief that she occasionally wore on her head. In the winter, she wore a long, dark coat with quilted lining and to cover her head a heavy woolen shawl that she tied around her neck.

Yelena Daniylovna never had a formal education but she learned well to count money and knew how to recite all the prayers because she attended church regularly. Like all town dwellers, she spoke Russian with a southern accent and mixed in a few Ukrainian words and phrases in her speech. Although she was a town dweller, her manners and deportment were typical of women of common origin. In the eyes of Makar Timofeyevich, who was a simple man, Yelena Daniylovna was just the right kind of woman for him. And they got married after a short courtship.

But very soon after their wedding, he found out Yelena Daniylovna's negative traits, which later became known to the entire family. She had an obstinate and stubborn character, and she dominated her husband, ordering him about in very unsubtle ways. In his twenty years of military service Makar Timofeyevich was used to receiving all kinds of orders. And, as a good soldier, he didn't put too much importance

on the unreasonable demands of his shrewish wife. Without answering back, he would just wave his hand to show that he was letting her have her own way. He found it to be an easy way to maintain peace with his wife.

Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Daniylovna Gladky had five children. The two oldest sons, Fyodor and Pyetr, didn't have any other siblings until they finished elementary school. Then, in 1875, the year Makar Timofeyevich retired at the compulsory for railroad workers age of fifty, their third son, Mikhail,<sup>1</sup> was born. A few years later, their only daughter, Maria,<sup>2</sup> and then their youngest son, Pavel,<sup>3</sup> were born.

All five children attended the elementary school in the hamlet of Nikitovka. At that time there was no secondary school there, so all their children, except Pavel, learned further on their own and on-the-job by starting in their teens at the station's office of Nikitovka.

After retirement, Makar Timofeyevich received a railway pension from the government. And, like all retired railroad workers, he continued to receive most of the benefits that he had while working: the rent-free, large room where his family lived; free coal and wood for heating and cooking; petroleum for lighting, and some free train tickets. The only benefit he lost was the winter and summer uniforms that Railway issued every year, but he had plenty of his old ones left to wear.

Although not too many details about the family life of Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Daniylovna were passed to their grandchildren, some interesting episodes were recounted often about Yelena Daniylovna's sister, who was much older than Yelena.

She became famous in the family because of some funny and some tragic incidents that children remembered about their aunt. She lived in the town of Bakhmut but often visited her sister's family in Nikitovka. To save money, she didn't take the train, but walked twenty-five miles even in her old age. She also had a very peculiar habit of sharpening the kitchen knives on the wooden stairs of their apartment, and nobody could convince her that wood would not sharpen a knife.

Another memorable, but tragic, event that happened to their aunt was during the big flood of 1907-1908 that made lots of damage in that region of the country. The small river Bakhmutka suddenly overflowed overnight taking by surprise the people living close to the river where the aunt's home was located. As was usual for the elderly, she slept on the low stove-couch. When her house was flooded and swept away by the water, she didn't have a chance to escape and drowned, and her body was never found. According to some family members, she was well over a hundred years old when she died, and some relatives even asserted that she was one hundred and fourteen years old.

As their five children grew older, Yelena Daniylovna complained that they needed more space for the family, but on her husband's pension they could not afford to move anywhere from that big room where they lived. Her dream was to own a house. She had to wait until her sons began working to be able to save some money. As soon as her two oldest sons, Fyodor and Pyetr, were of the age to work, Yelena Daniylovna rushed them to apply for jobs at the station of Nikitovka.

After their sons began helping the family by bringing home their wages, she saved all their money toward the purchase of a house. By the time their third son, Mikhail, began working, Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Daniylovna were able to buy a small but nice house in the hamlet of Nikitovka. Finally, Yelena Daniylovna had her

dream house; it was made of wood and had carved decorations that were characteristic of Russian cottages, and it was painted bright yellow.

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1. Orest Mikhailovich Gladky's father. See the chapter "Mikhail Makarovich Gladky."
  2. See the chapter "Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedev."
  3. See the chapter "Pavel Makarovich Gladky."

## Makar Timofeyevich Gladky's Oldest Sons

As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Very few specific details about the childhood of Makar Timofeyevich's two oldest sons were ever remembered in our family, except that they attended the elementary school in the hamlet of Nikitovka for four years and that in their teens they were placed as the office boys at the station. One detail, however, that was well known—even by the grandchildren—was that Yelena Daniylovna did not get along with her oldest sons and often quarreled with them even after they were adults. And so, it was common in our family to refer to her as a "Shrew Baba<sup>2</sup> Yelena."

The eldest son, Fyodor, contracted tuberculosis in his youth and was continually sick. He began as a messenger boy for the railroad office, and by learning on-the-job was promoted to office employee. Like his father, he didn't like to talk much, not even with his brothers. Probably because he felt always ill and tired, he didn't have any desire to be around people or to socialize. He never married and lived with his parents until he was about thirty years old, when he died of consumption.

The second-born son, Pyetr, also lived with his parents for a very long time. He began working at the station as an office boy, but he was diligent and a quick learner. He received several promotions within a short time. By his merit and perseverance, in his early thirties he was appointed to the position of Assistant Railroad Stationmaster.

Pyetr was a tall, handsome young man; he had natural dark complexion, brown eyes, straight dark brown hair, and an erect posture like his father. When he was promoted and received an increase in his salary, he decided to marry a young local woman that he had been courting for some time. But his mother upset his plans by vehemently opposing the marriage. She found some convincing evidence against the young woman, but probably the real reason in opposing this marriage was her greediness; she hated to lose from her grip the money that her son was bringing home. It became widely known at the station and in the hamlet that there was a highly dramatic quarrel between Pyetr's fiancée and her family. Afterwards, Pyetr was extremely upset and didn't want to stay in Nikitovka any longer. He requested the Railway Administration to transfer him to another station.

He was given a new position as a Railroad Stationmaster at the small station of Grammatikovo in southern Crimea. There, he received an apartment from the railway

authorities. Pyetr thought that the mild climate would be good for his aging parents and decided to have them move and live with him. The railroad authorities allowed him to use an entire freight car for moving their household. Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Daniylovna sold their house in Nikitovka and moved in Crimea.

But Pyetr very soon realized that he had made a big mistake in having his parents live with him. He had a hard time getting along with his bossy, bad-tempered mother. The situation grew worse when he again announced that he wanted to get married, and his mother again objected most emphatically, telling him that she didn't want to have another woman in the house. Pyetr sent a message by telegraph to his brother, Mikhail, who at that time was a telegrapher at the station of Nikitovka. Pyetr pleaded that he needed an urgent advice from him and their sister on the matters regarding their parents.

Mikhail immediately telegraphed his brother-in-law, Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev, who was the Stationmaster at the small station of Belyayevka to notify his sister Marusya<sup>1</sup>, of Pyetr's imminent arrival and his plea for their advice. When the three of them met in Nikitovka, they decided to pitch in and help their parents buy their own home in Crimea even though the homes were more expensive there than the one they had sold in Nikitovka.

Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Daniylovna purchased an old one-story house with a barn and big fruit garden in a small town named Stary Krym. It was located in a canyon in the foothills, about twenty-five miles southeast of Feodossia on the southern shore of the Black Sea. The climate there was mild, and the winter was warmer than spring in the Ukraine. The clean mountain air and nearby seashore attracted many tourists and health resort visitors who paid good money to rent a place year-round, especially in the wintertime.

Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Daniylovna converted part of the large, long barn into a room and a kitchen by installing wooden floors, two windows, a small door, and a brick stove. They lived there and rented the small house that stood on the corner of the street to resort visitors. The rent from the house plus the sale of fruit from their fruit garden provided additional income to supplement their railway pension. They had enough to live on, but Yelena Daniylovna continued to complain that they did not have enough, so each of their children mailed them five rubles every month.

After his parents were settled, Pyetr Makarovich married a well-to-do woman from Feodossia. They were blessed with two children born a few years apart—a daughter, Lidia, and a son, Boris. But Pyetr's happiness vanished quickly and his family life was disrupted because his wife died suddenly when the children were still very young.

Pyetr Makarovich was concerned for his small children and decided to find a woman who would be a good mother to Lidia and Boris. In his search, he met Alexandra Ivanovna Tsaritsyna, who was from a Russianized Greek family. She was companion to a very rich lady and had even traveled with her abroad to Switzerland. Pyetr liked her and decided to marry her, because she was educated and well-mannered. He also thought that she would be good at raising his children<sup>2</sup>. They had only one daughter, Ksenia, who was born the first year they were married.

1. A nickname for Maria. See the chapter "Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev."
2. See the chapter "Lidka."

## Mikhail Makarovich Gladky

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

My father was the third son born to Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Daniylovna. They named him Mikhail. He greatly resembled his father and his brother, Pyetr in appearance. He was slender, taller than average, and held his narrow shoulders back. His dark-brown hair cropped in a crew cut over his high forehead made his face appear to be longer than it really was. He had a straight, narrow nose, and under it a long moustache slightly curved up at the ends. He kept his short, well-rounded beard neatly shaved under his lower lip. And straight, narrow eyebrows accentuated his lively brown eyes.

As was the case with his older brothers, he had received only an elementary education in the hamlet school. He used to tell us, the children, that he didn't like his teacher who hit the students with a ruler and he often escaped from school through the window.

But Mikhail was intelligent and willing to learn; he educated himself in language, mathematics and especially in music, for which he had a natural talent. On his own he learned to play the harmonium, a small keyboard organ, and violin, and he further specialized in choral singing. When filling out applications and documents, on questions regarding his education, he used to write diplomatically "educated at home," which meant educated by hired teachers or tutors in the student's home. Like his older brothers, Mikhail began working in his teens at the railway telegraph office and worked his way up from office boy to telegrapher. That's when employees at the telegraph office stopped calling him simply, Mikhail, and started respectfully calling him Mikhail Makarovich.

When Mikhail Makarovich turned twenty-one, he was called up for military service, but, after the required medical exam, he was given the so-called "White Discharge Card" because he had a narrow chest below standard measurements.

Like all railroad employees, he wore a uniform with distinct decorations identifying him as a telegraph employee. In the winter, he wore a double-breasted jacket, pants, and a cap made of black wool serge cloth with yellow tabs, piping, and cockade. In the summer, both the jacket and the cap were made of white canvas, the pants of black canvas, with the same yellow decorations.

As a young man, Mikhail Makarovich was always involved in social activities at the station of Nikitovka. In the summer, he organized the public festivities that were held in the alley leading to the railroad station. His younger brother, Pavel, who was home during summer vacation, enthusiastically joined in to help him. He drew and hung large posters announcing the events and decorated the alley with handmade lanterns, while Mikhail Makarovich organized the music and dance.

For a long time there was no church at the station of Nikitovka and railroad workers, employees, and their families attended church in the hamlet. When the new railway station was constructed, the Southern Railways Administration ordered that a huge *iconostas*<sup>1</sup> be erected in the waiting hall so that religious services could be held there on Sundays and on holidays.

During the first services held in the waiting hall, all who came tried to sing their best. It was such discordant singing that Mikhail Makarovich decided to organize the choir. He selected the choristers, trained them to read sheet music and succeeded in directing the choir himself. Later, when Southern Railways built a church with an adjacent two-classroom Railway School for the children of the railroad workers and employees, Mikhail Makarovich became Preceptor of the Railway Church Choir. He was given permission to take time out to direct the choir at church if his shift at the telegraph office was on Sundays or on holidays, or any other day of special religious services such as weddings, christenings, or funerals.

As the performance of the choir got better and better, Mikhail Makarovich diversified their repertoire by teaching the choristers classical as well as old Ukrainian and Russian folk songs that were especially applauded by the audience. They gave performances in an auditorium built by the Society of Public Services of Nikitovka. People came from all the surrounding communities to hear them sing there. In time, Mikhail Makarovich and his choir became respected and well known for their fine musical programs and they were invited to perform their concerts in the clubs at the surrounding mines and dolomite works. Later, when the station was remodeled, the fourth class waiting room was converted to a Railway Club and the choir performed there.

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1. A partition or screen, decorated with icons as used in the Russian Orthodox Church.

## Pavel Makarovich Gladky

**As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky**

**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Danilovna's youngest son, Pavel, was the most handsome of the family. He was tall and well built. However, he was the only one among the brothers, to inherit the characteristic of their Gladky ancestors—the full and plump Trigubenko lips, which were very prominent on his otherwise well-proportioned face. He kept his long, straight, dark brown hair neatly combed back giving prominence to his face.

In his youth, Pavel had better luck than his brothers. When he was born, all his older brothers were already working and helping the family. Pavel demonstrated early a gift in language and the arts; he read eagerly, played piano, and he was very good at drawing and sculpture. He was the only one of Makar Timofeyevich's sons to receive a

formal education beyond elementary school. In order to allow Pavel to attend the Men's Royal Academy in Ysyum, all his brothers pitched in to pay for his tuition and living expenses. The Academy was a secondary preparatory school for entrance to technological and mining institutes of higher education.

His brother, Mikhail, preserved several photographs of Pavel's works created when he was a student of the Academy. Among them was a remarkable sculpture of Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian poet, whose poetry and songs Pavel greatly loved. Mikhail also preserved Pavel's student photo, in which he stood like a soldier at attention with a small sword hanging at his side. He wore a gray flannel, academy uniform full dress coat that fit tightly around his waistline and was fastened by closely spaced metal buttons running from its rigid military band collar almost to its hemline.

During summer vacation, Pavel enthusiastically helped his brother Mikhail who organized festivities at the station of Nikitovka. He drew attractive large posters announcing events and made colorful paper lanterns that he hung in the alley.

Upon graduating from the Men's Realny Academy, Pavel went on to study Chinese at the Institute Of Eastern Languages in the city of Tomsk, in Novosibirsk Territory. After graduating from the Institute, Pavel volunteered for military service, because as a volunteer he had to serve only two years instead of the regular four.

After serving in the military, his knowledge of Chinese gave Pavel Makarovich Gladky the opportunity to be accepted into civil service as an interpreter for the Judicial Court on the Eastern-Chinese Railway, in the town of Kharbin, in Manchuria. At that time the Court was involved in prosecuting gangs of Chinese railway robbers—the so called, *khunkhusy*—who attacked the trains, plundered freight cars, and robbed and murdered railway personnel and passengers.

In addition to his career in the civil service, Pavel Makarovich<sup>1</sup> was very interested in Chinese art, sculpture, and music. He wrote, illustrated, and published several booklets about these subjects. Copies of these booklets were preserved by his brother, Mikhail Makarovich, who kept all of Pavel's memorabilia as cherished family heirlooms and often allowed his children to admire them.

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1. See the chapter "Uncle Pavel."

## The Sisters Nadyezhda and Maria Mikhnyevich

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

My mother Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna Mikhnyevich was born in 1866 in Moscow. She and her older sister, Maria Vikyentyevna, were orphaned when they were very young. They remembered very little about their parents. They knew that both their father and mother were from Russianized Polish families belonging to the middle social rank of gentry, the middle and lower ranks of nobility. They also knew that their parents were of

Russian Orthodox faith, and that they resided in Moscow, as probably had a few generations of their ancestors. Being of noble descent, their parents were buried in the old well-known Novo-Dyevichny cemetery in Moscow.

After their parents' death, their relatives arranged for the two sisters to be placed in a girl's boarding school for the orphans of the gentry's families. The small family estate fund was allocated to pay for the girls' personal needs, board and tuition.

Growing up without their parents' love, the two sisters poured their affection out on each other, and their closeness provided the reciprocal emotional support that they needed. Maria had the stronger character of the two, but was rigid in her habits and convictions. Being older, she felt responsible for her younger sister and was vigilant over and protective of her. Nadyezhda had a more agreeable character and was more flexible in her behavior and beliefs. Being younger, she always listened to her sister's advice, but she had a mind of her own and always reasoned things out and did what *she* considered best.

At the boarding school they were brought up with a strong emphasis on religion, Christian morality, and good manners befitting to young gentrywomen. Besides the basic subjects of Russian and French Literature and History, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, they were taught music, art, and fine needlecrafts, which were considered to be essential to the gentlewoman's education. In addition to their general classical education, equivalent to gymnasium, they also received occupational preparation and graduated with certificates qualifying them to teach at elementary schools and in private homes.

With this preparation, the young graduates, who did not have a family to go to, could quickly find an employment and provide for themselves. At that time, teaching in public and private schools was common employment for women; women teachers were also in demand by the gentry, well-to-do, and the middle-to-high nobility who preferred their children to be tutored and educated at home rather than in the elementary schools.

After graduation, Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna and her sister, Maria Vikyentyevna, remained several years at their boarding school and taught there in order to complete their required teaching practices. This was their first paid employment, and they used all their money to prepare a dowry for themselves before they were ready to move out on their own. Both sisters had learned sewing and needlecrafts at school, and now in their free time they made their own clothing and items for their future homes.

Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna and her sister dressed conservatively and unpretentiously because they had become accustomed to it at boarding school, and it was considered appropriate for teachers. According to the fashion of those days, they wore long dresses, skirts and coats. Dresses and blouses for warm and cold weather had long sleeves, fitted bodices, and neckband collars. They were fastened down the center back with multiple small buttons. For the fall and winter, they made a couple of dresses and skirts in dark blue, brown, or gray wool cloth; for the summer and spring, they made them from cotton fabrics in the same colors. They also made several cotton blouses—white for the summer and darker colors for the winter.

Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna was accomplished at all fine needlework, while her sister preferred knitting and crocheting to embroidery. They shared their work by helping each other according to their abilities. Maria Vikyentyevna knitted and

crocheted from wool useful items to wear such as sweaters, scarves, gloves and stockings. Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna skillfully decorated in elaborate designs the entire fronts of blouses, yokes, collars, neckbands and jabots. She did detailing such as embroidery, pin tucks, lace overlays and delicate crochet with fine cotton. They also knitted and decorated with edgings and embroidery their linen and home accessories—bed sheets and pillowcases, towels, tablecloths and napkins, decorative cushions and table runners. And while they were students it took them years to crochet doilies and sets of bedspread and pillow shams.

When Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna and Maria Vikyentyevna were ready to leave boarding school, they went first to visit and seek advice from relatives who lived in the city of Kharkov in the Ukraine. One of their relatives was an accomplished actress at the Kharkovsky Theater and was well known in the theatrical and social circles of the city. Other relatives were part of the government bureaucracy and so had good connections. They directed the sisters to apply to the Administration of Southern railways that had their headquarters in Kharkov. Having personal recommendations helped both sisters to be promptly considered as candidates for teaching positions at railway schools.

At that time the Southern railways administration was searching for a Headmistress who could also be a teacher for the new Railway school at the station of Nikitovka. Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna was appointed to that position, and she accepted it with great enthusiasm. Her sister, Maria Vikentyevna, was directed to apply at the Office of Yekaterininsky railways where she was appointed as a teacher at the Railway school at the station of Khartsisk, located on the rail-line leading from Nikitovka to Rostov-on-Don. This made both sisters very happy, because their schools were located within easy reach by railway. It was thus very convenient for them to visit each other during school vacations. They received free railroad tickets and departed immediately to their destinations, since they needed to settle in before the school year began.

## Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna Mikhnyevich

As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna Mikhnyevich arrived at the station of Nikitovka late in the summer, well in advance of the opening of school. Pyetr Makarovich Gladky, the Assistant stationmaster, was standing on the platform when she got off the train. When she presented herself as Headmistress of the new Rail school, he welcomed her to Nikitovka and directed her to the Rail office to get the school keys. In the office they told her to settle temporarily in the Headmistress' office until they could find her a place to live. They ordered the errand boys to help her with her luggage.

The school was in the same building as the Christian Orthodox church that had been recently built by the Railway administration for families of the railway workers and employees. As a devoted Christian, Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna went at once to the church to thank God for her new place of employment. There she met the *Batyushka* and

*Matushka*, as the clergyman and his wife were called, who blessed and welcomed her to their parish and made her feel right at home.

They noted immediately that Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna was an energetic young woman who would be an asset to the community. *Batyushka* informed her of the important people she needed to know when conducting school business; *Matushka* introduced her to the many practical details of daily life in Nikitovka. She complemented Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna on her dress that was fashioned after big city styles. She admired her pure Russian muscovite accent that was a sign of an educated and refined woman. She explained that this trait would distinguish her from local inhabitants who spoke Russian with a southern accent mixed with dialects and Ukrainian words. *Matushka* also told Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna that with her pleasant looks and gentlewoman's manners she could choose among several eligible young men in their parish to whom she could introduce her. But Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna replied that school was the only thing on her mind at the moment.

Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna indeed presented herself as a distinguished young woman. She had a slender figure, she was average in height and neatly dressed. Her long, chestnut-brown hair was accurately arranged away from her face, combed neatly back and twisted into a tight knot secured with hairpins at the nape of her neck. She kept her small, narrow lips tightly composed, which lent her face a serious expression. And the manner of holding her chin slightly upward, imparted an overall dignified demeanor. Those were some of the manners taught at boarding school to students preparing for a teaching career. Indeed, the first impression one had of her was her deportment, rather than any specific physical trait.

Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna was modest in her dress; however, she allowed herself to indulge in refined embellishments. In the fall and winter, the focal point of her costume was the white jabots attached to her dark-colored dresses; in the summer, she preferred to wear impeccably white blouses that enhanced her light complexion and lent a soft luminosity to her gray-blue eyes.

Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna returned from church with a good impression of the small, tightly connected community of railroad workers and employees of the station Nikitovka. She felt that she had made the right choice by accepting the position. Her mind had filled with high hopes for the future as Headmistress of the new Railway school. She impatiently waited for the arrival any day now of the two teachers. And most of all she enthusiastically began preparations for welcoming her new students to the new school.

## Mikhail Makarovich Meets Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna

As Recounted by by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Mikhail Makarovich Gladky<sup>1</sup>, as Preceptor of the new Railway church choir in Nikitovka, was among the first persons to meet Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna Mikhnyevich<sup>2</sup>,

the newly-appointed Headmistress and teacher of the new Railway school. Their encounter was facilitated by *Batyushka* who suggested to Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna that Mikhail Makarovich was talented in music and could teach her students music and singing. After a short interview, she hired him on the spot and they decided upon a music program and a schedule that would not conflict with his shifts at the telegraph office.

Working together and having almost daily contact with each other, they soon discovered that they had many common interests. They liked to work with children, to take part in community cultural activities, and to socialize with friends and colleagues. And, although Nadyezhda Vikentyevna was nine years older than Mikhail Makarovich, from their first days they felt very comfortable in each other's company.

Later, their common interests and personal attraction led to a short courtship that culminated in marriage in 1899. During the wedding ceremony, the choristers honored the bride and groom with their best performance. Present at the ceremony were Mikhail Makarovich's parents, Makar Timofeyevich and Yelena Daniylovna; his brother, Pyetr Makarovich, and his sister, Maria Makarovna, with her husband Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedev<sup>3</sup>, and Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna's sister, Maria Vikyentyevna; two teachers from school; and the Stationmaster and many employees of the station of Nikitovka.

To honor Mikhail Makarovich as Preceptor of the Railway church choir, *Matushka* organized, for all who attended the ceremony, a reception with light refreshments, or a *zakuska*. Everyone had a small glass of vodka or *nalivka* wishing health, happiness, and many children to the newlyweds. Then, *Matushka* helped Yelena Daniylovna prepare a small dinner for the family and a few close friends.

Shortly before their marriage, Mikhail Makarovich was promoted to the rank of senior telegrapher and received a raise in salary appropriate to the position. Like all railway employees, Mikhail Makarovich and Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna received a rent-free apartment. They moved into one of the duplexes built long before for railway employees. The houses lined the railroad tracks on the so-called "right of way" land owned by Southern railway. The houses were made of wood covered with clay and painted with whitewash.

They had a comfortable apartment; it had four small rooms on one side of the hall, and on the other side was a small home office for Mikhail Makarovich and a big kitchen with a pantry. The entrance was through a back porch into the kitchen.

In the courtyard, there were cherry trees, an outhouse, a summer kitchen, a cool earth cellar<sup>4</sup> for keeping seasonal provisions and perishable food, and a shed for wood and coal. These facilities were shared with the neighbors who lived in the other half of the house. Water was stored on the porch in a wooden barrel. It was delivered free by the water-carrier in a big barrel pulled by a horse.

In addition, like all railway employees, they received free petroleum for lighting, and coal and wood for heating and cooking. Also, they were entitled to twelve free round trip-tickets, which they could use for themselves and their children on any railway in the country, fifty-two provisional tickets for traveling on Southern railway lines, which they could use for school vacations, for traveling to purchase provisions, or for any other trips. In addition, when needed, Mikhail Makarovich could have free passage on local lines, if he was traveling in his railway uniform.

Mikhail Makarovich and Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna used their free tickets right away during their first school vacations. They visited her sister, Maria Vikyentyevna<sup>5</sup>, who taught at the Rail school at the station of Khartsisk, and his sister, Maria Makarovna, whose husband, Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev<sup>6</sup>, was a stationmaster at the small station of Belyayevka.

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1. See the chapter "Mikhail Makarovich Gladky."
  2. See the chapters "Nadyezhda and Maria Mikhnyevich" and "Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna Mikhnyevich."
  3. See the chapter "Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev."
  4. A cellar with an arched ceiling dug in the ground and insulated with a thick layer of earth protruding as a mound above the ground.
  5. See the chapter "Maria Vikyentyevna and Yuryevich Family."
  6. See the chapter "Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev."

## Family of Mikhail Makarovich Gladky

As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

After their marriage, Mikhail Makarovich and Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna continued in their careers and led a very active community life. When their first daughter, Anna, was born, Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna resigned from her position as Headmistress of the school but stayed on as a History teacher and also taught Needlecrafts to the girls.

Mikhail Makarovich and Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna had four children. After the birth of each child she steadily gained weight, adding quite bit of fat each pregnancy. By the time her last son, Igor, was born, she had become very plump.

Although she had a full load teaching at school, she found time for community involvement and for educating all of her children at home. But, at first, she had one, and then two servants living in their home who helped her with cleaning, laundry and cooking, as well as watching the children.

Their oldest daughter, Anna, was born in 1901, and they affectionately called her Anya. From infancy, she greatly resembled the Gladky ancestry, and as she grew older, these traits became more prominent. She was dark-complexioned with straight, dark brown hair and brown eyes. Her high forehead, long narrow nose, and wide lips were definitely Gladky's. At an early age Anna had shown a pert, unrestrained way of voicing her opinions and a tendency to criticize others. She was not easy to get along with, and in the family her character was often compared to that of her paternal grandmother, who had been disparagingly called *Babka* Yelena.

On October 29, 1902, their oldest son, Orest, was born. They gave him the nickname Rostyk. He greatly resembled his father. He had the same long nose, high forehead, straight brown hair and brown eyes. But he had inherited his mother's light complexion and smooth skin. As a child, he was skinny and agile.

His father liked to tell a story about Rostyk when he was less than two years old. For Easter he was given a small chocolate egg with a “surprise” inside. Rostyk cracked the egg and started to eat the chocolate pieces before anybody had a chance to take out the “surprise,” which was a little tin heart.

His mother rushed to him, asking, “Rostyk, where is the little heart? Did you swallow it? Where is the little heart?” She swept her finger through his mouth hoping to find it there.

“Little heart... swawow... little heart...” repeated Rostyk while holding one hand in a tight fist.

“Open your hand, Rostyk, show me what you have there,” his mother insisted.

But Rostik would not open his hand. Finally his father opened it. But there was nothing in his hand.

Anya was jumping up and down screaming maliciously, “Rostyk swallowed the little heart! Rostyk swallowed the little heart! Now Rostyk will get sick!”

The joy of Easter turned into worry. What would happen to Rostyk if he *had* swallowed the tin heart? His mother could not sleep all night; she kept getting up to see if Rostyk was alright.

In the morning, a servant was cleaning the room. She came to Nadyezhda Vikiyentyevna and said, “Look, Mistress! See what I found under the table?” And she handed her the little tin heart.

In 1906, their youngest daughter, Vera, was born. She was slender and above average height; even as a young girl she was taller than other girls her age. Like her mother, she had narrow lips and light brown hair. But her brown eyes, and long narrow nose were both definitely Gladky traits. She was an obedient girl who did not cause her parents any trouble as she grew up.

On January 22, 1911, the youngest son, Igor, was born. He got all his physical traits from his mother. In childhood his hair was blonde, but later on it turned light brown. His light-gray eyes were exactly the color of his mother’s, and he had her smooth, white skin and narrow lips. But as he grew up, his nose became more and more like his father’s. It was probably the only Gladky trait that he inherited. As a small boy, he loved to be with his father during choir rehearsals, and he poked his nose into everything, trying to help with minor chores. As the youngest son he was raised more leniently with less emphasis made by his mother on discipline and obedience than she used with his older brother, Orest, and his sisters, Anya and Vera.

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1. The Grandmother, in Ukrainian popular dialect.

## My Childhood In Nikitovka

As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

My father<sup>1</sup> was always gentle and loving with us children. I remember when my sister, Vera, and my younger brother, Igor, were very young he entertained them with their preferred play. They liked to sit on his knees and play with his moustache.

"Are you a coward?" he would ask.

They would shake their head.

"No? Then pull my moustache!" And after letting a child pull it for a while, anticipating his reaction, he would suddenly bark, "Bau-bau!" The child would emit a loud shriek and they would both laugh wholeheartedly.

I also remember that he was not strict with us children and always tried to see the reasons for our transgressions from a child's point of view. He never used corporal punishment, and when we deserved, he left the task to our mother.

My mother<sup>2</sup> loved us too, but she expected us to be obedient and to do what she ordered or taught us. In this she was strict but fair, both at home with us children and at school with her pupils. She usually punished fairly and in the accepted ways of the times. She either put the culprit in the corner of the room, or on his knees, or both. Sometimes she punished by leaving us without a dessert or by making us stay alone in our rooms. I remember that during one of my visits to my mother's classroom, she punished the whole class for something they did wrong by making them stand on their knees on the seats of their desks.

My father had two musical instruments at home, a harmonium and a violin. Both were accessible without restriction to us children at any time, and we were taught how to handle them at an early age to ensure that we would not damage them. When each child was old enough to understand and follow instructions, all of us were allowed to try to play both instruments.

Anna and Vera did not pursue it any further than exploring the instruments. I was the only one who had enough patience to learn to play both instruments from sheet music, but I did not learn with my father's passion and played mostly for my own pleasure. Igor didn't have any patience for learning to play the instruments, but he always hung around our father during choir rehearsals. Being surrounded by our father's musical passion and activities, all the children in our family loved and appreciated classical and folk music and songs.

My mother taught all of us children to read, write, and do basic arithmetic at an earlier age than was usually given in the two years of preparatory classes—or the equivalent education at home—which was required prior to admission to elementary school. She often took one of us with her to school in order to get us used to the school's routines, rules, behavior, discipline and teacher's authority. We usually sat at a desk at the back of the classroom during her lessons. Therefore, all of us were ready before the established age to take the entrance exams and were accepted into elementary school by the age of eight.

I remember that about the time we began to attend elementary school, big changes were occurring at the station of Nikitovka. Southern Railways gradually demolished all old houses where their workers and employees lived. In their place was built a large complex of one-storied, three-apartment, buildings and two-storied, six-apartment, buildings of white brick.

Our family moved into one of the new one-story apartment buildings. It was a big change from the old four-room house in which we lived before. Our new apartment

consisted of one very large room and one smaller room, a hall, and a big kitchen. I remember that I was wondering how all that furniture we had in the old place would fit in that big room. I watched with great curiosity how my mother directed the men who were moving the furniture to place each piece where she wanted it to be. I still remember vividly how that big room transformed itself into a multi-functional living space.

By the ingenious placement of our furniture, my mother subdivided the large room into several smaller living areas. At the far back, the room was divided across by two big pieces of furniture. A big wardrobe was placed with one side against the wall to the right side of the room and its other side against a tall bookcase with the glass doors. Both pieces faced the largest part of the room, the left side, next to a window, was left unobstructed to allow entrance to a smaller area behind the furniture.

The division formed a sleeping area for my mother and father. In its right corner, their enameled metal, double bed was placed with one side against the wall. On the wall above the bed hung a large plush tapestry with a copy of a popular picture by the renowned Russian painter, I. I. Shishkyn, "Morning in the pine forest." It depicted a mother bear and three baby bears playing in a pine forest. It was customary to hang such tapestries next to the side of the bed touching the wall. This was done primarily for the practical purpose of insulating the cold wall in the winter and to protect the wall from rubbing up against it by the person sleeping next to it. Its decorative effects were secondary to its useful purpose.

This bed was so high that in my child's imagination it resembled a huge, white elephant. On a metal spring base there was a thick feather-filled mattress and on top of it was a soft and voluminous down-filled comforter with an elaborately decorated in white embroidery protective cover. Every morning my mother ordered one of our maids, "Fluff the mattress and the comforter well!" And I often heard my mother warning the maid to be careful in placing on top of the comforter a white crocheted bedspread of intricate design, "Handle it gently." And she would proudly explain, "It took me several years to crochet that bedspread while I was teaching at the boarding school in Moscow. That's when I began to prepare my dowry on my small salary." Then she would prompt the maid to puff up the many fluffy, down-filled pillows in their white embroidered pillowcases and pile them up in the corner of the bed, between the metal bars on the headboard and the tapestry. I often wanted to climb on top of that bed and feel how far down I would sink into that soft elephant body.

Next to the bed was a small night table covered with a starched, crocheted doily. On it were always a glass and a carafe of water. At the foot of the bed, close to the window, stood a rocking chair with decorated plush cushions. My mother was strict about not allowing us children to rock on it. But my father, occasionally, when my mother was in the kitchen, would signal one of us with his finger to get up on that chair and rock for a few minutes while he watched the door in case our mother would come in. We all kept this rocking chair ritual as a big secret from my mother, even Anna never told her about it.

On the other side of the division, opposite the bookcase full of books, stood the harmonium. It was always covered with a starched, crocheted runner and had a round piano stool in front of it. Against the wall was a small desk and chair. This area of the room was my father's home office. The desk was always piled high with copies of

music scores that he prepared for all his choristers for their ongoing performances.

One of the drawers of his desk was specifically allocated for his smoking paraphernalia. In it was a box filled with tobacco, another box of cigarette-wrappers and the tools with which to fill them at home. My father began smoking very young in life; he considered himself to be a connoisseur of fine grades of tobacco and was very particular in his choice. It was his ritual to make up his own blend and his own cigarettes.

At the other end of the larger side of the room opposite the door to the hall was a dining area with a long dining table and chairs. Against the wall stood a modest cupboard with an armchair on each side of it. The table was covered by a tablecloth and table runner set, and the cupboard had a matching cupboard runner, both of which had been embroidered by my mother's skillful hands.

Facing the table, in a corner of the room, hung an icon that had belonged to my mother's parents which was a cherished family heirloom. A linen *rushnik* elaborately embroidered at both ends in cross-stitch was draped around the icon according to Ukrainian custom, and in front of the icon hung a small oil icon-lamp that was lit on Sundays and holidays.

In the center of the room, between the home office and dining areas, there was a living area that was defined by an oriental area rug that overlay the painted wood floor. To one side of the rug, between the windows, was a sofa. Above it hung three large prints in simple wood frames of the famous Russian composers whose music my father admired—Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Mussorgsky. On the other side of the rug were two armchairs that matched the sofa with wood frames and upholstered seats, backs, and armrests in a soft plush. The upholstered parts were protected by antimacassars<sup>3</sup> crocheted by my mother.

The two windows were adorned with white curtains and linen draperies, edges and hems of which were embroidered with the exquisite Richelieu guipure<sup>4</sup> work that my mother was famous for. Under the windows stood lots of plants, all sorts and sizes. Especially numerous were the date palms home-grown from pits.

Next to the big room was the children's room. All us children slept in this smaller room, each in his own bed. The enameled metal beds were placed with their headboards against one wall for the girls and on the opposite wall for the boys. There was a bookcase filled with children's books and school textbooks. In the middle of the room was a table and chairs where we did our homework. A large wardrobe with double doors stood majestically to one side of the room, and next to it was a tall chest of drawers where all the family linen was stored.

The doors of the two rooms opened onto a small hall where there was a wall rack on which to hang seasonal outer-clothing. At the end of the hall was a washstand where we took turns washing up in the mornings.

At the opposite end of the hall was a large kitchen with a separate walk-in pantry where all non-perishable provisions were kept. The big brick stove with the oven was incorporated via chimney into the partially hollow wall between the kitchen, big room and the hall. It provided heat for the whole house. The doors to the kitchen and the other rooms had to be left open to allow the heat circulate throughout the house.

In the middle of the kitchen was a large table where the food was prepared and the family ate everyday. The chairs were neatly tucked under the table so there would be

enough room to move around. Sideways against the wall, leading out of the passageway, stood a narrow metal bed upon which our two servants slept together with the positions reversed. The entrance of the apartment was through a small porch to the kitchen.

My father's colleagues, Khmara and Bayrachny, occupied the other two apartments in the building. All three families who lived in the three apartments shared several facilities built in the courtyard including a summer kitchen—a wooden structure with a big brick stove and an oven—where all cooked on hot summer days. At the far end of the courtyard were a woodshed and an outhouse that served all three families.

Other facilities served all the families living in all one-story buildings. Not far from our summer kitchen was a single outside faucet that provided running water. Farther on, behind the summer kitchens was a big earth cellar providing a cool place to store perishable provisions.

At first, the families received free petroleum for lighting, but by 1910 all the houses where railway workers and employees lived had electric light. Water and electricity were free, as was coal and wood for heating and cooking.

All railway workers and employees received free railway tickets<sup>5</sup> for themselves and their families. Because my mother and father had free tickets, our whole family often visited both of our aunts—my mother's sister, Maria Vikentyevna, who lived in Taganrog, and my father's sister, Maria Makarovna, who lived in Belyayevka. Both sisters visited us in Nikitovka quite often, too. All three families maintained close ties throughout their lives.

My mother managed her household efficiently with the help of the two very carefully selected servants to whom she gave detailed instructions and always checked to be certain that the work was well done. One servant took care of the children, laundry and ironing and helped the other servant with other chores. The other servant cooked, took care of the kitchen, heating, and cleaning the house.

When I was very young, my father already had a well-organized choir. My mother and we children attended church every Sunday. Usually we stood in the first row because in the Orthodox churches there were no benches to sit on—everybody stood and kneeled on the floor. I was so proud to watch my father conduct the choir in front of everyone attending.

Although my father was a true believer, for him the most important part of church service was the music and the impeccable singing of his choir. Often, when one or more of the choristers was slightly out of tune, I could hear his exasperated whisper, "You, multi-striped devils!" I remember that after the service, *Batyushka* admonished him, "Mikhail Makarovich, please, at *least* try to say it not so loud, so the people in church won't hear it..."

My father and his choir became well-known throughout the surrounding communities. Sometimes our mother took us all to hear their concerts of classical, old Ukrainian and Russian folk songs when they performed in the Railway Club, or in the auditorium at the Society of Public Services of Nikitovka. However, we didn't go when they were invited to perform in clubs at the surrounding mines and dolomite works. I remember that they also gave charity performances to benefit wounded soldiers and their families during World War I.

My father was also quite active in the local theatrical group, where he was a

prompter. On occasion he prompted for the professional theatrical groups that often stopped in Nikitovka on return from seasonal performances in the resort areas of the Caucasus.

My mother had refined my father's appearance. Before he married he wore his free railway uniform everywhere. She ordered him new suits made by the tailor, Golytzin, who came all the way from Slavyansk to take orders from his special customers in Nikitovka. He took their measurements and offered them a choice of fabrics from the best merchants, displaying samples that he brought with him. Then he came back for two fittings and to deliver the finished suits.

Both my father and my mother had many friends and were much respected in the community. Someone was always visiting them in the evenings, on Sundays, and on holidays. *Batyushka* and *Matushka* and their children visited often, combining the pleasure of the company of friends with the need to discuss and make plans for the choir at the special church services. They had tea and dessert, and we children played together and became friends.

Other visitors were also good friends with our whole family. Among those who visited frequently were the Assistant Railroad Stationmaster, Kuzenko, his wife, and their son, Vadim, who was my schoolmate and best friend. Occasionally my father's friend Piletsky came by to have a good talk. He was from the office of railway carriage and locomotive repair works. In addition, my father selflessly gave up his free time to hold rehearsals at home with the choir bass singer, Bayrachny, and to hold thorough or special rehearsals with other members of the choir apart from the group, and he accompanied them on harmonium or violin. We children were allowed to listen if we wanted.

Our mother was a very skillful needlecrafter and our home was like a display case containing samples of her craftsmanship: doilies, table runners, tablecloths, napkins, bedspreads, bed sheets, towels, and, of course, her own and her children's clothing. She always had several projects underway: fine embroidery, or crocheting, or knitting wool items for the family. In the evenings she enjoyed the company of her friends, Lyubov Ivanovna Tytova and Olga Ivanovna Popova, teachers from her school who were eager to learn her various needlecraft techniques and chat about many things that they had in common.

On certain days after school, especially in the wintertime, she invited about six to eight girls, her students, into her home and tutored them in needlecrafts. They would all sit in a circle and crochet or embroider. My sisters would join them. My mother would put on her gold frame glasses and would also work on a needlecraft project while telling them some interesting stories from history or literature. Especially, she liked to tell the stories from the Bible or New Testament, which she considered to be a subject that a teacher had a duty to include in her students' education.

In the hamlet of Nikitovka, as in any other small community, everyone knew everyone. My mother was trusted and respected for her wisdom by her students and their parents, who sought her advice when making important family decisions. For instance, when their daughters were to be engaged, they would ask her, "That young man is proposing to our daughter. What you think of him? Should we give him our daughter in marriage?" My mother would advise them according to her best judgment, "That one drinks already, now that he is young; he probably will be a drunkard. You'd

better forget about him.” About another one she might say, “This one will be a good husband. He is a good worker and is respected by his superiors.” Her advice was always taken very seriously by the parents.

During religious holidays, my mother would put on her best dress and my father would put on his best suit and they would wait for visitors to stop by with greetings. At Christmas, in the dining portion of the large room, the table was covered with an elaborately embroidered, festive tablecloth. On the table were several bottles of vodka and various kinds of *nalivka*, and lots of cold refreshments: ham, *pirozhky*, all sorts of salami, sardines, spiced sprats, cheeses, nuts, fruits, and all kinds of baked goods. Friends, acquaintances, choristers, and co-workers would come one after the other, alone or with their families to have a glass of *nalivka*, or vodka and some refreshments, and their children would have some sweets. The visitors would exchange holiday greetings and good wishes with our parents, talk a little about their common interests, and depart to visit another house.

When my sister Anna and I grew up, at about the age of ten, it was time for us to start secondary school. The nearest gymnasium was located in Ysyum. Instead of sending us to live with strangers in Ysyum, we were sent to Taganrog to live with our aunt Marusia, my mother’s sister, so we could attend the gymnasium there. We both passed the gymnasium entrance examinations and were accepted into the first class. Anna enrolled in the Women’s Gymnasium in 1909, and I enrolled in the Men’s Gymnasium two years later, in 1911.

In both gymnasiums there were eight years of studies. Each year at both institutions the curriculum included Russian Language and Literature, History, Mathematics, and Foreign Languages. These were taught from the first year on and included two languages for girls and four for boys. In the first year German was introduced; in the second, French; in the third, Latin; and in the fourth, Greek. In addition, at different years Biology, Physics, and Chemistry were taught. Gymnastics was required for boys every year. After their seventh year, young women could enroll in the University, or they could enroll in an optional eighth year at a Women’s Gymnasium that qualified them to teach in the elementary schools. Or they could take occupationally oriented courses to prepare for nursing or office work. The Men’s Gymnasium also prepared students for university entrance, but young men who didn’t plan to pursue further studies could enroll in an eight-year course that qualified them to teach at elementary schools or trained them for government service. Therefore, when a young man or woman graduated from gymnasium, if he or she didn’t plan to go on to study further at a university, they were ready to begin a career in any of the fields offered in the eight-year at gymnasium.

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1. Mikhail Makarovich Gladky.

2. Nadyezhda Vikyentyevna Mikhnyevich Gladky.

3. A decorative, functional scarf used to protect the backs and arms of upholstered furniture.

4. Lace-like open work with patterned shapes joined by bars, worked in buttonhole stitch.

5. See the chapter “Family of Mikhail Makarovich Gladky.”

# The Yurevich Family

As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

After leaving the boarding school in Moscow Maria Vikentyevna Mikhnyevich<sup>1</sup>, Nadyezhda Vikentyevna's sister, was appointed by the Yekaterininsky railway administration as a teacher at the Railway school at the station of Khartsisk, which was located on the rail line leading from Nikitovka to Rostov-on-Don. There she met Bonifaty Ustinovich Yurevich, a young man from a Russianized Polish family. He lived in the town of Taganrog on the eastern shore of the Azov Sea where he worked for the post office as supervisor of the installation of telegraphic lines. They got married, and Maria Vikentyevna moved to Taganrog where her husband lived with his father. In the new town she didn't look for employment in a school, but conducted private classes with about fifty to sixty students in elementary education. In addition, she gave private lessons and tutored students in her home.

Maria Vikentyevna was a tall, stout woman with light brown hair combed upward and twisted at the back in a tight knot. For a close-up work and reading she had a small pince-nez pinched on her nose. She held her lips tightly closed which gave her face a rather stern expression that was accentuated even more by the cold stare she gave children when she talked to them.

Maria Vikentyevna and Bonifaty Ustinovich had three children—two daughters and a son. The oldest daughter they named for her mother, Maria, and nicknamed her Marusya also; the youngest, Lyudmyla, died very young. The son, Bonifaty, was named after his father.

Soon after her first child was born, Maria Vikentyevna found a new way to earn additional income for the family, and they moved to another house. That house was located in a suburb of Taganrog called Kaspirovka. In the front of the house there was a small Spirit Shop, which commonly was called simply the *Monopoly* because the sale of alcoholic beverages was a monopoly of the government. The State Treasury owned all Spirit shops. To take care of the shop and to sell vodka and other alcoholic beverages, the Treasury hired a woman that was called *Posydelka*. Maria Vikentyevna, as a *Posydelka*, received a salary, a free adjacent apartment, and fuel for heating, cooking, and lighting.

Since taking care of the store took up most of her time, she gave up teaching classes in elementary education. She kept only private students from gymnasiums (whom she tutored in special subjects) and volunteers for special areas of military services (whom she helped to prepare for military entrance examinations).

In Kaspirovka the store was known as "Marusya's Monopoly" and a *chastooshka*<sup>2</sup> was even invented, which passers-by sung when encountering habitual Monopoly patrons headed toward the store.

Maria Vikentyevna took care of the customers and Bonifaty Ustinovich, upon coming home after a days' work at the Post Office, took the cash from the store to the State Treasury. He usually walked with his walking cane, as was the custom for a man in those days. His cane had a handle that was elaborately carved into the shape of a

hatchet. To speed up his walking time, he would take a shortcut by walking through small, narrow alleys instead of taking the main roads.

One day he took his son, Bonifaty, with him and proceeded along his usual route. But, as soon as he entered the alley, two *muzhiks*<sup>3</sup> ambushed him there. One grabbed his son around the neck and ordered, "Give us the money!" When the other one tried to grab the moneybag, Bonifaty Ustinovich acted quickly and hit the first *muzhik* on the head with the handle of his cane. He hit the second one on the hand that held the moneybag. Not expecting such a quick reaction, the *muzhiks* panicked and ran away. Bonifaty Ustinovich reported the incident to the Treasurer and so, well enough, the police caught the *muzhiks* and brought them to court. Both father and son were called as witnesses during the trial. This episode was recounted many times in the Yurevich family, they presented it as a heroic act of Bonifaty Ustinovich.

Another incident that Bonifaty Ustinovich also bragged about involved thieves. It happened late at night when his hunting dog kept barking for a long time. Bonifaty Ustinovich grabbed his hunting gun and carefully went out the back door. He heard someone crawling on the roof. So, he slowly walked to a well, climbed onto its border and in the dark, without taking aim, fired the gun over the roof. The thief rolled down the roof and fell into the street where his accomplice was waiting for him with a cart. They drove off as fast as they could.

In 1914, when the war against Germany started, the government stopped selling all alcoholic beverages and closed all their monopolies. By this time Bonifaty Ustinovich had retired from the Post Office, with the government pension and had taken over the Spirit Shop. Maria Vikentyevna then increased the number of students she gave lessons to at home, tutoring more students in special subjects, and preparing students for entrance examinations at various schools and for military service exams. Since the Yurevich family had lost all income and benefits from the Spirit shop, which was the Government monopoly, and the house and shop belonged to the State Treasury, the town arranged it so they could buy that house.

Bonifaty Ustinovich adapted the shop into his own room and put a cast iron stove in it, which he stoked himself with wood or coal. Children were allowed in this room only under his supervision because in a short time his room had begun to look like a museum. After he retired he began to collect antiques such as table lamps, clocks, watches, and similar items that he repaired for resale. He was a devout Catholic, and every Sunday, without exception, he would stop at the open market when returning from church and look for bargain items. After repairing and shining them, he sold them to select customers at a higher price than he had paid.

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1. Orest Mikhailovich Gladky's aunt. See the chapter "Sisters Nadyezhda and Maria Mikhnyevich."

2. Humorous folk verse that is sung in a lively manner.

3. Ukrainian word for a peasant, also used as a depreciative for a man in the street.

# Attending Gymnasium in Taganrog

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

From the time we were very young, our mother often took us to visit our aunt Maria in Taganrog. Therefore, we felt close to our cousins Bonifaty and Marusya. Cousin Marusya was a couple of years older than Anna, and Bonifaty was about four years older than I. When my parents decided to send us to attend gymnasiums in Taganrog, Anna and I lived for several years with Aunt Maria. This made us grow even closer to our cousins.

The Yurevich's house was small, so sleeping arrangements for us children had to be improvised as best as possible. Anna slept with her cousin Marusya in one bed, and I slept on the portable bed placed sometimes in the hall and sometimes in my aunt's bedroom, where my cousin Bonifaty slept atop a big wooden trunk.

Though my aunt's husband was Catholic, she was devoted to the Russian Orthodox church and brought her children up in the Orthodox faith. She was very strict with her children and especially rigorous and uncompromising when demanding obedience to the religious rules she established. She insisted that all us children say our prayers aloud each morning and night on our knees on the floor and checked to see that we were doing it right.

Although Anna and I got along quite well with our cousins, it was a different story with our aunt Maria. My mother had a more liberal interpretation of saying a prayer before going to sleep. For me, not being used to such strict rules at home, kneeling was real torture. I wrote my mother such a whiny letter, complaining about the impossible demands and expectations of my aunt that my mother considered it necessary to come to Taganrog herself to settle the matter with her sister. After many hours of negotiation, Aunt Maria finally conceded in this argument; she did not torture me with kneeling prayers anymore.

Every Sunday afternoon my uncle, Bonifaty Ustinovich, had a visitor, a young Catholic priest from his church. Being young, the priest liked to have conversations with my cousin, Marusya, and my sister, Anya. At that time Marusya was an attractive young girl of about seventeen or eighteen. Suddenly the young priest disappeared from the church. After several months he returned dressed in layman's clothes and asked Bonifaty Ustinovich for the hand of his daughter Marusya in marriage. But, because he had previously been a priest, Bonifaty Ustinovich refused to give his permission. I remember that my cousin Marusya was upset for a long time after her unsuccessful engagement.

In 1914, when my cousin Bonifaty was about seventeen years old and in his last year in gymnasium, he had an appendectomy. In the hospital they made him get up before he was steady on his feet, he fell and broke his leg. The leg was put in a cast, and in those days a patient with a fractured leg was kept to recover in the hospital. Therefore, Bonifaty stayed at the hospital for several weeks until he was able to walk with crutches. During his long stay at the hospital, he fell in love with Tatyana Kekusheva, one of the young nurses who took care of him. They continued to see each

other and, in the summer of 1915, when Bonifaty graduated from gymnasium, they decided to get married. Maria Vikentyevna and Bonifaty Ustinovich expected their son to enroll at the university and absolutely opposed the marriage.

Determined that he had the right to make his own decision, Bonifaty and Tatyana came to Nikitovka to seek help from his aunt Nadyezhda and uncle Mikhail, because they wanted their marriage to be consecrated in the church. After examining the situation and all its consequences, my mother and father decided they could not allow their nephew to live in sin, as he said he would do if there was no other way. They decided to help the couple, especially after Bonifaty reassured them that he would attend the university after they were married.

My mother notified her sister that her son's wedding would be held in Nikitovka on such and such date, and emphasized Bonifaty's promise to attend the university. But Maria Vikentyevna and Bonifaty Ustinovich refused to come to their son's wedding. My father made all the arrangements at his church so that everything would be according to the traditions of the Russian Orthodox religion, and he gave them the best possible wedding ceremony, with his choir singing during the service. After the ceremony at church, my mother had a festive dinner ready at our home.

During the dinner, my mother sent me to get fresh water and gave me a glass pitcher. I zealously ran to the faucet in the courtyard and back, but my hands were wet and the pitcher slipped out of them onto the floor, right in front of all the people sitting at the table. Anna, who was always outspoken, started to shame me, saying that at fourteen years of age I still couldn't do anything right. To make me feel even worse she added, "Now, you see what you have done? This means that the marriage will be broken too!"

My father stopped her right there saying, "Stop talking nonsense!" But it was too late, everybody had a bitter feeling after hearing this folk's bad omen.

Bonifaty and Tatyana returned to Taganrog. They lived in Tatyana's rent-free room that she lived before as a hospital nurse and where she continued to work after her marriage.

Bonifaty kept his promise; he enrolled and attended the university at Rostov-on-Don, traveling every day by rail, which was about two hours one way. During their first year of marriage, their son, Yuri, was born.

In 1916, during summer vacation, my uncle Bonifaty Ustinovich suddenly died of *angina pectoris*. On that sad occasion my aunt Maria and her son Bonifaty reconciled, with a little help from my mother and my father, who had come to the funeral. My aunt Maria remained alone, because her daughter Marusya got married.

Marusya went to live far from home in the Caucasus in a large Cossack village, called in Russian *stanitsa*, Kyslovodsk. She moved there with her husband Ivanov, a teacher, who was by origin a Cossack. She had met him after graduating from gymnasium when she got the position of elementary school teacher at the railroad school at the station of Khanzhonkovo, which was located south of Nikitovka on the Southern rail line going to Rostov-on-Don. They had two children, a son, Igor, and a daughter whose name I don't remember. Marusya's husband turned out to be a drunkard and a womanizer, and she had unsuccessful personal and family life.

In the fall of 1916, when Anna and I returned to study in gymnasium at Taganrog, Anna slept in cousin Marusya's bed, and I had Bonifaty Ustinovich's room all to myself. I

finished the seventh school year there. After summer vacation, in the fall of 1917 the new gymnasium had opened in Nikitovka and I stayed at home to finish my eighth and last year there. Anna, influenced by the enthusiasm of many young women during wartime, enrolled in a one year nursing course and after graduating stayed in Taganrog to work at a military hospital. At the beginning of 1918, she returned home to Nikitovka and worked in the railway hospital.



## **Part Two**

### **Revolution and Civil War**



# Starting Out In Life

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In May 1918, I graduated from the Pedagogical Courses of Modern Languages of M. A. Stats in Kharkov.<sup>1</sup> We had a formal graduation ceremony followed by a reception and an evening ball. There were only a few young men to dance with—they were just starting to return home after The Treaty of Breast-Litovsk was signed in the beginning of March ending the war—so the young women had to dance with each other. That's how we celebrated the end of our studies and the end of students' carefree life. We knew that with the tumultuous situation in our country tomorrow we would face the harsh reality and begin to earn our living.

I couldn't find employment in Kharkovsky province and returned home to Slavyansk. Immediately I applied to the Ministry of Popular Education of Yekaterinoslavsky province for a teaching position in the secondary school.

By this time the wave of revolution had engulfed all parts of Russia, including the Ukraine. The unrest was already reaching the smaller cities, towns, hamlets and villages and was sowing seeds of fear and uncertainty in the minds of people. I started my adult life during hard times—at a turning point in the history of Russia—the turbulent years of revolution and civil war.

Brought up with a spirit of morality and having received a solid education, I was confident in my abilities as a teacher. The enthusiasm of youth gave me hope that I could find my place and be useful in the field of education in the new Russia, in whatever form it should emerge from these hell-broke-loose events.

At the end of summer 1918, I received a list of several places of employment from which I could choose. I applied for a teaching position in the newly opened gymnasium in the small hamlet Nikitovka adjacent to a large railroad station by the same name. Shortly after, in the fall of 1918, I received confirmation to my first place of employment for the 1918-1919 school year. There I started my teaching career as a teacher of Russian, in the elementary classes, and French, in the secondary classes.

I arrived at the station of Nikitovka and stepped out onto the platform with a big wicker basket containing all my belongings that included my French and Russian textbooks and a few of classic literature books. I found a room to rent from one Jewish family. They recently added this room to their house and made a separate entrance, which I liked because it gave me more privacy than I had renting the rooms as a student.

The new gymnasium in Nikitovka was of co-ed type, for both boys and girls. It was opened after many efforts made by a local population and mostly with the Jewish community funds. Nikitovka's well-to-do Jews collected money also from all surrounding hamlets, whose residents could benefit from the new school by sending their children there for the secondary studies.

The number of students enrolled in the newly opened school was small, especially in the highest class where I taught French. In that class there were only ten

students, six Jewish children, three girls and three boys, as well as four Christian boys. I still remember the names of some of my students: Vadim Kuzenko, son of Yelysey Ivanovich Kuzenko, the Assistant Stationmaster; Orest Gladky, son of Mikhail Makarovich Gladky, the Senior telegrapher at the station's telegraph office, and Nadyezhda Vikentyevna Mikhnyevich Gladky, the History teacher in the Railroad elementary school; and Adrian Volkov and Yasha Malobrodsky, both sons of railway employees.

As a young teacher, I was shy around my older students, sixteen-year-old boys who were taller than I and not at all timid in making ambiguous comments about my appearance. They became bolder after noticing that I was easily embarrassed and blushed profusely at their seemingly casual remarks. They spoke among themselves in subdued voices, but loud enough to make sure I heard them.

I wore to school my best half-circle style, long, green, silk taffeta skirt, and a white lawn blouse decorated with pin tucks and a narrow stand-up collar ruffled at the edges. My wavy hair (I used strips of cloth around which I curled it overnight) was tied at the nape of my neck with a huge green silk bow.

I was especially annoyed, when, as I moved around the classroom, my skirt made a rustling sound, and someone in the classroom would hiss, "Sh-sh-sh-sh, sh-sh-sh." Then, from the other side of the room another student would admonish the first one in a louder tone, "Sh-sh-sh, be quiet!" And all of them would chuckle, covering the mouths with their hands or hiding their faces behind the textbooks. And I, in a very strict manner, would quiet them down by saying, "That's enough! Let's get back to our lesson!"

The Director of the gymnasium was Boris Alekseyevich Polyevoy. He was a very kind and likable man. There was mutual respect and understanding between him and all teachers. Students loved him for his fairness and also because he mingled with them before and after school and during recesses between classes.

His wife, Zinayda Petrovna, who was originally from Crimea, taught Natural Science. She was skinny, dark-complexioned, with black hair rolled in a large bun high on top of her head. Being a chain-smoker, her fingers and teeth were rusty-yellow color of tobacco. The Polyevoy's had a five-year-old daughter, Alochka, whom they adored. They had a servant who took care of the child and did all household chores, but most important, she was a good cook.

Then there was Ira Victorovna Adler, a teacher of German in the upper classes, who became my best friend. She was of German origins and an excellent teacher. The four of us, Boris Alekseyevich, Zinayda Petrovna, Ira Victorovna, and I became very good friends during my first year of teaching in Nikitovka.

During this time the civil war was just beginning in the Ukraine. The authority in Yekaterinoslavsky province changed hands several times—from Whites to Reds, and from Reds to Whites. Many young men and boys were volunteering in the White Army, though some were drafted by the Reds. Many families abandoned all their belongings and departed somewhere—where nobody knew them. They were escaping the Reds, who, everywhere they were arriving, threatened loudly to "settle the old scores" with "bourgeois" and with "exploiters." And in those two categories could fit anybody. It was enough for somebody to point a finger at you and say, "He was..." and you would instantly become the "enemy of the people." There was no law, justice, or due process.

All the rumors about the brutalities of the Reds produced a panic in the

population—all felt to be in danger. People feared for their lives, even those who never harmed anyone and who lived decently, but had the “misfortune” to own their house, or have a good employment position, or were clergymen, or owned shops, or small businesses. Most of the students in our gymnasium were from families of this kind. Many local students left with their families; others, from out of town, fearing troubled times returned home to be with their families. Some entire classes at the gymnasium became deserted, or so small that they had to be consolidated. The school days were often irregular, depending upon what was going on in the hamlet after receiving the latest news from the station of Nikitovka.

Population depended on the news brought by the railroad employees arriving on the trains from different locations and from telegraph messages that were coming from other railroad stations. They knew where were the Reds, Whites, and Greens, who overpowered whom, who occupied such and such town, hamlet, or a village. The situation was so fluid and changed so quickly that only the first-hand source could give the people some reliable information on which they could base their decisions—to stay put or to run, and in what direction. One thing was clear, people ran away from the Reds toward the areas that were in the hands of Whites and away from the battlefields.

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, “1917-1919” [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniakh* [Nikita Khrushchev In My Memoirs] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967) trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## My Native Home

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

It was autumn, 1919. Not having had any news from my parents for a long time, my worry about their fate was increasing every day. I finally decided to make my way home to Slavyansk.<sup>1</sup>

I went to the railroad station early in the morning. After several unsuccessful attempts at finding passage, only in the evening was I able to find a place on an open freight car going in the direction of Kharkov. Under normal conditions, traveling from Nikitovka to Slavyansk took about two to three hours. But now, the train moved slowly and stopped for long time at the stations so that it arrived at Slavyansk Station very early in the morning, when it was still dark.

My muscles and joints were frozen stiff from the cold wind gusts in the open freight car and from sitting the whole night in an uncomfortable position on the floor. At first, I couldn't even stand up straight. The station attendant told me that the local branch *Vyetka* was not going to town until late afternoon. I had no choice but to walk four kilometers to get there. The silence of the approaching dawn was frightening. But I was impatient to get home and, although I was scared to walk alone in the dark, I ventured on the road. As I was slowly regaining the use of my legs and feet, I increased

my speed and walked hurriedly on the deserted road. When I had reached the outskirts of town, the first sounds that I heard were the distant clatter of hooves and the remote rattle of a cart on the pavement.

The sun had not yet risen when I found myself in my familiar neighborhood. Excitement has changed into anxiety as I approached my father's home. Here was the house, but why were the gates wide open? It looked to me as if somebody just gone out and forgot to close them. Palma, our old dog, a true friend of the family, rushed towards me with a plaintive whine, and began to run around my feet as if she were complaining about something. Suddenly, she dashed away barking loudly and ran towards the back porch. I hurried to follow her but stopped on the stairs, astonished by the unexpected sight before me.

Dentist Ostrovsky, who lived across the street from us, and his mistress, dressmaker Maria Zaitseva, were pulling our big oval dining room table through the door. It got stuck in the door, even though the folding panels on both sides had been removed. The dentist, who was wearing only pajamas and slippers, saw me first. Looking embarrassed, he stopped pulling the table and began to pace back and forth on the porch. Palma continued to bark furiously. Ostrovsky's fat, large-bosomed mistress had disheveled hair and was wearing her morning robe. She rudely and shrilly shouted to the dentist, "You, devil! Why are you dashing around the porch? Pull it, I am telling you, pull it! Turn it around quickly!"

Then she turned her head and saw me standing on the steps. She diverted her attention to me and, reproachfully shaking her head, said, "Your father and mother along with the rest of your family have just run away from home..." Trying to justify herself, she added, "Somebody else will take it anyway. And, by the way, I can use it for cutting out fabric." Then she changes to a sweet voice, "It is better that we take this and save some of the other things for them," as if she really intended to return our things to us sometime in the future.

Hearing suddenly such unexpected news, I was overcome with emotion and couldn't speak. My thoughts overwhelmed me, "They left home, father, mother, my youngest sister Olga, and my little brother, Pyetya... They abandoned their home... Why? Where have they gone? Did they go somewhere else where it's better or not so dangerous?"

The distant clatter of hooves and the remote rattle of a cart in the silence of the early morning clearly resounded in my head. I understood all that had happened just before my arrival and thought, "My poor, poor mother! She could not understand what was happening. Frightened by all the threats, arrests, and reprisals of the mob against the 'bourgeois,' it was probably she who forced my father to abandon our dear home."

Large tears were dropping from my eyes onto the floor, and onto Palma's head and paws. She licked them, licked my hands and feet and continued to yelp and to beckon me into the house. The dentist and his mistress finally pulled the table through the door leaving it wide open, and I absentmindedly entered the dining room. It was already half empty. The cupboard doors were open; a few chairs were lined against the wall. Apparently, the "thoughtful" dentist's mistress didn't have time to salvage them for "safekeeping." I noticed that the table was not there, and suddenly remembered how they pulled it out onto the steps, and how impudently they carried it past me and across the yard towards the gate.

Exhausted, I sat down and suddenly felt very hungry. I went into the kitchen and was surprised to feel the heat coming from the brick stove. I opened the oven. There, in a blue pot, were curd dumplings, still warm. Holding back my tears, I began to eat, but could barely swallow. I thought, "Apparently, they left quite recently. Maybe I've only missed them by about half an hour or a little bit more." I felt like running and catching up with them to stop and bring them back to our dear home.

Then I heard the guarded tread of footsteps in the hall. I came out of the kitchen and saw Maria Ivanovna Belichenko<sup>2</sup>, one of our good neighbors, at the threshold. In tears I rushed toward her. "Don't cry, *Tonyechka*<sup>3</sup>," she said. "They left before dawn for Yusovka, to a safe place, to our friends' home. God willing, everything will settle down and they soon will return. Come to our house, we will talk a little and you can stay over-night with us. Also, I'll show you the bundles your mother left with me for safekeeping."

It was very hard for me to stay alone in our empty house, so after I had selected a few items to take with me, I went to Maria Ivanovna's house. While she was busy with her children, I browsed through some books on the table and in the bookcase. Most of them were paperback classics, which had been received as supplements to the popular journal, "Niva."

On a lower shelf there were many newspapers and brochures. Looking through them I found a slim booklet with a very long and uncommon title, "Social-revolutionaries and the land issue."

"Is this also a supplement to 'Niva'?" I asked Maria Ivanovna showing her the booklet.

"That's all that my husband brought from the village. He was always interested in agriculture and the land issue, and he subscribed to the journals "Bee Keeping" and "The Agricultural Journal."

"Is he perhaps a revolutionary?" I asked her timidly. "Maybe he is, I don't know exactly. You see, he was always very reserved about disclosing his political views, even to me. After the revolution, he became noticeably more cheerful. And lately, I don't know why, he began traveling back and forth to the village of Bantushevo. Then, unexpectedly, he shaved himself, got a haircut, shortened his long mustache, put on his new suit and departed for Bantushevo. He did not return for a long time. When the White Army came back to town and to nearby villages, he came home and was on the alert the whole time. Then the Whites slowly retreated south, and the Reds showed up again. My husband left again for Bantushevo and only told me, 'Well, now we will start to organize a new life.' You know, he said that they now call the Reds by a strange name, 'Bolsheviks'<sup>4</sup>, but that he doesn't agree with their ideas because they don't care about land reform as the Social-Revolutionaries do."

Suddenly she remembered why she had invited me and exclaimed, "Well, well, my dear, why don't I show you what your mother left for you and your sisters. Look, here it is all in this corner," and she pointed to several bundles stacked in a big basket. "Your mother selected things from a big trunk and put them in the three separate bundles, then placed them in that big basket which she brought to me for safekeeping. She told me, 'This is a dowry for my three oldest daughters. Let them share it. If Tanya, Tonya, or Nyusya should return home while we are away, please give them their dowry and these small boxes of their personal memorabilia that I collected for them.'" Maria Ivanovna went to the chest of drawers and took out a small box and handed it to me, saying, "And

this is what your mother told me to give you.”

I opened the box carefully. There was a small silver icon representing my saint, Saint Anthony. I looked at it with tenderness. “Yes, yes, it’s the same one that was tied to my crib, and later hung above my child’s bed, and then on my bed until the last day I was at home. It’s the same small silver icon that was placed on my neck when I was baptized,” I recalled aloud as I looked into the small box. “But there is something else, here. It’s the golden locket my father gave me when I graduated with a silver medal from the gymnasium.” I opened the locket. My mother’s and father’s pictures were still inside. And, at the bottom of the box, wrapped in tissue paper, were my graduation silver medal and a five-ruble gold coin left for me by my Dyedushka Daniyl when he died.

“Your mother was very sad,” continued Maria Ivanovna. “Lately she’d been crying all the time and asking me, ‘Tell me, please, what kind of sedition is happening in our Russian land? Who needs it? Who will rule Russia now? Could it be that it will be somebody like Styopa Bolotov?’ Your mother was afraid of this Styopa Bolotov, because he often visited your father and always threatened him. He was telling him that, because he owned two brick houses and had a tailor shop where he ‘exploited’ a master, a master’s assistant, and several apprentices, he would be arrested very soon. After they arrested the Bezhanovs—you know, those two shopkeepers who lived across the street—your father hid himself in our fruit garden where he sat all night up on the large branch of a big pear tree.”

Maria Ivanovna sat next to me on a sofa and explained what had been happening in our small provincial, commercial town while I had been away, “The revolution brought much turmoil to our town. When the Reds came to stay awhile in town, they just started to purge it of the so-called ‘enemies of the people.’ People were confused; they couldn’t tell who ‘the enemy’ was. Some said that it was anybody who owned property or shops; others specified that the ‘the enemy’ was ‘rich’ people, or those who have employed—or like they coined it now ‘exploited’—other people. Therefore, nobody could figure out what might happen to him and his family. Dear *Tonyechka*, as most tradesmen families in town, your father and mother were under extreme stress, doubt, and uncertainty.”

Then Maria Ivanovna took my hand between her palms and held it gently, wanting to reassure me and keep me calm while she was telling me the state my mother was in during the last days before their departure, “Your mother was already obsessed with worry over the frequent visits and threats of Styopa Bolotov, who suddenly became a zealous revolutionary. Her perception was that she would inevitably lose her husband if they remained in town. This belief was supported by the fact that so many of our neighbors, friends, acquaintances, as well as your father’s customers had already been arrested by the Reds. After listening to all kinds of frightening stories about what had been happening to many well known people in town, and after seeing what happened to our neighbors, your mother believed that Bolotov’s threats were real and she cried and begged your father to flee to another town where nobody knew them.”

Maria Ivanovna caressed gently my hand and emitted a deep sigh before telling me the other reason that were bothering my mother, “Recently, new rumors have been spreading quickly in town that wild hordes of a fanatical revolutionary Latvian Red division were advancing in the direction of Slavyansk. The rumors were that on their way, this division takes the law into its own hands, and its men are committing the atrocities of indiscriminately killing anyone who has property, shops, small businesses,

or merely a decent looking home.”

She shook her head, as if trying to free herself from the terrible nightmare and added, “Your mother was so frightened by all the terrible events and rumors she had been hearing that when she heard the latest rumors about the atrocities of the fanatical Red Latvians, she renewed the pressure on her husband to leave home and flee from this town. She kept insisting on it until she finally convinced him to make a quick decision.”

I interrupted her with my comment, “It’s so unusual for my father to make decision in a hurry about something as serious as an irreversible break with the past! It’s so contrary to his meticulous habit of following the tailor’s proverb, ‘Measure ten times and cut only once.’ But, as you said, events have become so confusing for anyone to understand. And fear for one’s life and for the safety of his family were probably overwhelming!”

“A few days ago,” continued Maria Ivanovna, “your mother came to see me, she was so excited and told me, ‘Finally, my Gavryusha had decided to immediately flee from Slavyansk. But now I am concerned about where we should go. We don’t know anybody in any big town with whom to stay for a few days until we can find a permanent place.’ Well, I suggested that I have good friends in the town of Yusovka, a very nice warm hearted family, Kuzma Tyeryentyevich and Alexandra Iosifovna Ylyukhin and their small daughter Anya. They have a comfortable apartment and, if I ask them to help my friend’s family, they certainly would agree to give them a refuge for a short time until they would find a place to live. And I reassured your parents that Kuzma Tyeryentyevich would also help them to get settled in the new town.” And Maria Ivanovna reassured me, “So, I wrote a short letter to Alexandra Iosifovna asking her to help my good friends and long time neighbors and gave it to your mother.”

She paused for a while before telling me the rest of the story, “Your father immediately called on his brother Stepan in the village and asked him to transport the family as soon as possible to Yuzovka. His brother arrived yesterday evening with the big cart they used for bringing melons to market. They packed all they could carry, and all night they loaded their belongings. Your mother said that your father told her that his skills as a master tailor were more precious than gold, because nobody could take them away from him, and that with his work he could provide for his family anywhere and under any conditions. Therefore, he loaded his sewing machine and all the items from his shop, including the heavy tailors’ table, *katok*, so he would be able to start his trade immediately to support his family in the new place.”

Then Maria Ivanovna’s voice became relaxed and she described the last hours before departure of my family, “While the men were loading, your mother and I made fresh dumplings with cottage cheese brought from the village by her brother-in-law, Stepan. Then, early in the morning your mother woke Pyetya and Olya up and we all sat around the table, as is customary to do according to folk tradition for good luck before a departure. Your father said a prayer, and they all ate a good meal for the road.

“As he walked out of the house, your father made a big cross to bless his home, locked the door and gave the key to his brother. He told him to take the rest of their furniture and household goods on his way back and bring it to the village.

“I embraced them all and wished them good luck. Your mother was crying and kept repeating, ‘God bless this house... God bless it... Only God knows if we ever will

return here...' They were on their way out of town before dawn, so nobody would notice they had gone. Only I knew for sure where they were going."

Maria Ivanovna paused while nodding her head as if she was confirming her story. "That's how it happened," she concluded and reassured me again, "Don't you worry, *Tonyechka*, about them. The Ylyukhin's will give them a very warm reception and will help them get settled."

We talked with Maria Ivanovna for a long time into the night. There were so many things that worried us both because of the uncertainty of their outcome. "Well, they created a revolution, and they're promising so many things," reasoned Maria Ivanovna, "but nobody knows how it will turn out. What is so surprising is that now so many feel and behave like they are the masters. And who are they? Look, for example, at Styopa Bolotov<sup>5</sup>. He acts like every day is his Saint's day! He goes around expecting everybody to congratulate him. But what does he do? He intimidates and threatens everyone..."

Although I was exhausted physically from the long trip and from walking all the way home from the station, the emotions of the day and the news about my family that Maria Ivanovna recounted kept me awake. I was trying to make sense of all that had happened to my mother, my father, my young sister, and my little brother...

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Rodnoy dom" [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniakh* [Nikita Khrushchev In My Memoirs] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967) trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Additions as recounted by the author and by her younger brother Pyetr Gavriylovich Berezhnoy.

2. See the chapter "Kharkovsky Street."

3. Endearing of the name Tonya.

4. Revolutionary faction led by Lenin.

5 See the chapter "In Who's Name?"

## The New Masters

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

The next day after my arrival in Slavyansk, I got ready to go back to Nikitovka and my school. In the morning, I went back to our house to look for the last time at everything so reminiscent with sweet memories and so dear to my heart. I entered every room, stopped by every item, touched it, as if saying farewell to all that had been acquired and collected in forty years by my parents. My father's hard work and my mother's caring and thrifty housewife's hands made it possible for us to live in this cozy, pleasant house. Every piece revived in my memory the carefree childhood and the joyful years of my youth lived here, in my father's home. All things in our home were not luxurious, nor excessive; they were only what was necessary for any family to have a comfortable and happy life. I was carried away by my memories.<sup>1</sup>

Suddenly I had a vivid sensation—like I had just returned home from a trip or had come home from a walk—and expected someone to greet me. I even heard footsteps in

the house. Yes, yes, I clearly heard footsteps and the creak of new boots resounding in the hall. I came near the door to see if it was just my imagination, but it wasn't.

Styopa Bolotov, wearing a soldier's coat and a cap with a red star, with a gun across his shoulders, was swiftly walking down the hall, looking into each room as he passed. A woman wearing a red kerchief was following him.

"Aha! They are gone, then; they did run away on time. And you, Miss Tonya," he addressed me sarcastically stressing the word *Miss*, "what is the matter, why are you still here?" Then, without waiting for my answer, he quickly added, "It doesn't matter, anyway!" And opening his arms wide—almost touching the two walls of the hall—he solemnly declared, "In the name of the revolutionary decree I requisition everything: the house, the furniture, and all other contents of this house!"

He looked at the woman in the red kerchief and with an air of overestimated self-importance told her, "Come in Ulyasha! It is all ours now. Come in, come in, don't be shy, be the mistress of the house!"

As they walked through the hall, he observed, "What a nice house tailor Berezhnoy has built for us." Then he added sharply, "All this with our money. Exploitation... Bourgeoisie..." These new words sounded strange in his otherwise shallow vocabulary as if he had learned them by rote without understanding their meaning. He pronounced them distinctly as if he was trying to show off his revolutionary proficiency.

He proceeded to the living room—the woman in the red kerchief followed him. There he continued his monologue, "Now, then, let's try out to sit here, in this armchair. It's most likely to be soft." He complacently sprawled in the chair upholstered in soft, green plush.

Suddenly he jumped up from the chair and dashed toward our small piano polished like a mirror. "This, now, is also ours!" and roughly pushing the pedal with his boot he struck the keys with all five fingers. With a wild dissonance the sounds rolled throughout the house and stopped somewhere in a corner of the half-empty dining room.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha!" he burst into a fit of laughter. "Now we will sing our new songs! And all of this is only junk!" He grabbed the music sheets lying on the piano and threw them into the air. As the music sheets fell to the floor, he stepped on them with smelly boots freshly smeared with tar.

One of the music booklets fell onto a small table nearby and knocked down a porcelain figurine called "The Three Graces." The figurine fell to the floor and "The Three Graces" got split into three parts. I rushed to pick up the pieces. Styopa Bolotov laughed again and, tapping me on the shoulder, told me in a condescending manner, "Take it, take it, we don't need this junk."

After I collected the "Three Graces" and calmed down, I observed that Styopa Bolotov's appearance had changed considerably from the time I knew him as an apprentice in my father's tailor shop. He became thin and pale, with hollow cheeks, and his ash-gray eyes, which in the past were narrow and half-covered by eyelids, now looked wider. A tiny smile winked from his eyes and slightly parted his lips. His previously lazy movements now were swifter and self-confident.

The woman in the red kerchief followed him everywhere. She seemed somewhat embarrassed and avoided looking at me. They went into the bedrooms and tried out the

featherbeds as well as every pillow on each bed. "U-u-ugh, how plump they are! I remember how the maids were plucking goose feathers so the misses could sleep on soft featherbeds. Now we will sleep on them! They are likely much softer than the hard table in the tailor shop where I slept when working for tailor Berezhnoy." Then he announced suddenly in a very solemn voice, "Well, Ulyasha, I have to go, very important matters and revolutionary comrades await me."

Ulyasha, or Ulya, was the daughter of blacksmith Dmitry Kusnetsov, who lived on our street, not far from us, and she was my childhood girlfriend. Her father had his own farriery. As children, we often dropped in and stared in wonderment at the way her father forged horseshoes and nailed them to the horses' hooves. I remember that I could not watch without pity when he hammered burning hot nails into the poor horses' feet, and Ulya used to laugh at me. She pulled me against my will to the bench, where the horse was tied to, and scream at me, "You, little fool! Look, I am not afraid of anything!"

Her mother contracted tuberculosis and died very young. Ulya, as the oldest daughter, had to manage the household and so was unable to graduate from the girls' gymnasium. Styopa Bolotov quite frequently visited her, and occasionally I saw Ulya sitting with him on the bench in front of her house.

When Styopa left us alone, I asked her, "Did you marry him, Ulya?"

"Now it is not necessary—there is freedom now," she replied resolutely.

"And what does your father say about it?" I insisted.

"Nothing. I tell you—there is freedom now—and we can just live together this way," she answered, again avoiding looking me in the eyes. And she reasoned further, "And why should it matter to me? Styopa is now in the Red Army, and he has registered himself as a member of the Bolshevik Party. Who knows, he might even find himself some day in some *Soviet*<sup>2</sup>. You see, times are like this now—the doors are opening—if only one doesn't miss the opportunity. And so what, if he's illiterate—that doesn't matter. He'll learn fast." She told me all this as if anticipating my questions and explained further, "Yesterday, in the Workers Club was a meeting for women; they explained to us that even a woman-cook could govern the country. They say that Lenin himself said so."

Then she suddenly turned toward me and spoke further with an arrogance, clearly trying to insult me, "And you are nothing now! Educated, graduated from gymnasium, courses for teachers, speaking foreign languages. In-te-lli-gen-tsia<sup>3</sup>!" She pronounced this word distinctly, syllable by syllable, with contempt. Then, spitting in my direction, she suddenly turned away from me and, with the confident stride of the mistress of the house, walked into the room next door and started to put it in order.

Astonished by her outburst and painfully humiliated I went slowly to the back porch and glanced over the courtyard. Then I went down on the stairs and found myself in the fruit garden. A light breeze brushed my face. The trees stood bare, without leaves. It looked as if nothing had changed in the garden. There were no signs of ravaging. Mighty branching apple trees, shapely pear trees, and thorny apricot and prune trees stood quietly awaiting winter. A brown carpet of leaves, shining with dew, covered the ground. Passing by the summer kitchen surrounded by lilacs, I noticed a young tree with a small sign attached to it. The inscription read: "*Belyi Naliv*<sup>4</sup>, 1918. Olya."

Olya, my younger sister, was thirteen years old when she planted this new variety of apple tree. Our neighbor Belichenko, brought the little tree from his nursery, where he

had cultivated it from a wild apple tree. He promised Olya that in a few years she would have a light amber colored and fragrant fruit that would ripen early in the summer. Olya loved to work in the fruit garden and often wondered, "How a mankind could use all the riches of nature to create such delights for themselves as the fruit gardens." She told us with enthusiasm, "I will certainly be a gardener! I want to cultivate new varieties of fruit trees."

When I departed to assume my first position at the gymnasium in Nikitovka, Olya saw me off, saying, "Being a teacher is very difficult work. It is not like cultivating trees. We will see what kind of students you will bring up." And my mother, kissing me goodbye, said with pride, "Our Tonya is a clever girl, she definitely will become a school Headmistress."

And suddenly, I remembered the remote rattle of the carriage when I walked at the outskirts of the town and thought, "Where are they now? Will they come back home someday?" I knelt and kissed the ground and took a few autumn leaves as a keepsake of my native place.

Calmed by the silence and the fresh air in the garden I felt a gleam of hope as I walked toward the gate. The unrelenting past was slipping away from me, though the present and the future still seemed uncertain.

The next morning I went to visit aunt and uncle of my sister-in-law, Katya, wife of my brother Kolya. They hadn't had any news from my brother in a long time. Because they lived closer to Shnurkovskaya, the local railroad branch stop, and I could take an early morning train from there to Slavyansk Station, they allowed me to sleep my last night in town at their house.

The day before, I had selected some items from my home for myself and put them in the small bundle that my mother had left for me and placed it in a wicker basket. The other two bundles that were my sisters' dowries, I left for safekeeping with Maria Ivanovna Belichenko.

With the permission of Katya's aunt, Varya Grechko, and her husband, Misha, I brought my basket containing my bundle and the other items to their home. That afternoon I went to visit some of my girlfriends and also said goodbye to Maria Ivanovna Belichenko. In the evening I returned to Aunt Varya's to stay the night. Before going to sleep I needed to add some other items to my bundle including a few of my French books that I had left at home. I discovered that my bundle was not as neatly tied as I left it. Indeed, upon looking inside it I noticed that several embroidered batiste undershirts were missing.

When I complained, Aunt Varya shushed me, "It is probably my husband's daughter who went through your things." But she warned me, "Please, don't complain so loud that my husband could hear it, because the girl is light-fingered and it is not the first time that she had been caught stealing. If her father found out that this had happened again, he will kill her this time."

Aunt Varya promised me, "If I would find any of your undershirts in the house, I would return them to you." But I never got from her anything back. This episode left such an impression on me that I could never forget it, because my trust in the honesty of persons, whom I thought I knew well, was violated.

I took an early morning local train that was, surprisingly, on time. But, when I arrived at the Slavyansk Station, I had to wait until late evening for a train going south.

Finally, there was one going in that direction.

I got into the freight car crammed with people sitting on their luggage or lying on the floor. It took me awhile to get used to the darkness and find a spot to sit on my bundle. At night, the train proceeded at a slow pace, stopping for hours along its way in the middle of fields, where the Red Army controlled a portion of the railway tracks.

There, the commissars<sup>5</sup> jumped into every car and, throwing light from hand lanterns into the frightened faces of passengers, behaved as if they were looking for someone. They checked documents, insistently demanding to know who each person was, where each one was going, and why. Then they forced the “suspected” individuals to get off the train. Under the guise of searching for political enemies, they made a thorough search of every suitcase and basket, and fingered through all bags and sacks, opening them and taking flour, salt, grain, potatoes, and all such products the people had succeeded in bartering for somewhere.

During the searches I pretended to sleep while sitting on my neat basket, which had not raised the suspicion of the Red commissars. As we approached Nikitovka, everything quieted down, and there were no more searches. When we entered the area occupied by Whites, only once were we visited by a patrol, which checked to see if there were no Red uniforms among the passengers.

The train stopped at the station of Nikitovka late in the morning. As I stepped onto the platform, I saw one of my students, Vadim Kuzenko, standing next to his father, Assistant Railroad Stationmaster. Vadim recognized me and very gallantly offered to help with my basket. He carried it all the way to my apartment. As we were walking, we shared the most recent rumors about the Reds and what would happen should they finally take full control of our small hamlet and a very important railroad station and rail junction, which they had already tried to take several times. For the same reason, the Whites kept it. Although Vadim was only sixteen years old, he was very concerned over the policy of the Reds that drafted young men into the Red Army. I was surprised that my pupil, whom only a few months ago I considered just a boy, suddenly was behaving as a grown-up young man. And I thought, “How dangerous events make these children mature so quickly!”

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, “Novyi khosyain” [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniakh* [Nikita Khrushchev In My Memoirs] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967) trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Additions as recounted by the author and by her younger brother Pyetr Gavriylovich Berezhnoy.

2. Council (usually used with the specific name of a governing body, such as Town Soviet or Village Soviet)

3. Intellectuals.

4. “White Juice.”

5. Political agents of the Reds and Bolsheviks during the Civil War in Russia.

## A Tragic Refuge

**By Olga Gladky Verro**

**As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and Pyetr Gavriylovich Berezhnoy**

When Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy and his family arrived in the town of Yuzovka in the autumn of 1919, they found refuge in the apartment of Kuzma Tyeryentyevich Ylyukhyn and his wife Alexandra Iosyfovna. They were good friends of their Slavyansk's neighbor and a friend Maria Ivanovna Belichenko. Ylyukhyns had a large apartment and they agreed to share one of the rooms with Gavriyl Daniylovich and his family until they could find themselves a permanent place to live.

Ylyukhyns were indeed a very friendly and generous couple and shared selflessly their place with the refugee's family. And the children also got along very well. Their daughter Anya, who was a few years older than Pyetya, quickly became Olya's friend.

At that time, a typhoid epidemic was taking its toll on the population. It was almost impossible to protect oneself from the infection that was passed on through food and contact with contagious persons. Natalia Iosyfovna had to go to the market every day to find her family something to eat, since here they didn't have any provisions stored in their pantry as they had at home. Soon after their arrival in Yuzovka early in 1920, Natalia Iosyfovna caught, probably from someone at the market, the typhoid enteric fever. She had to be placed in a mill hospital, where she was so sick and had such a high fever that, after much suffering, she died without regaining consciousness.

Gavriyl Daniylovich managed to find a clergyman to perform the modest funeral ceremony and buried his wife, as she would have wanted, with Christian Orthodox rites. He was sorry that he had to lay her to rest in Yuzovka's old town cemetery, far from her home and far from her relatives and friends, with only the Ylyukhyns attending the funeral. They were the only people who knew her there, because neither she nor Gavriyl Daniylovich had had time to make any friends yet. It was not like it would have been if she had died in Slavyansk, where their relatives and friends, neighbors, acquaintances and her husband's customers would have paid their last respects. It was also impossible to notify their children quickly. They could not get there fast enough to attend the funeral, because neither the mail service nor the railroads were functioning regularly at that time.

While his wife was in the mill hospital, Gavriyl Daniylovich met the hospital doctor, Fyedor Vasylyevich Bervy, who took care of her. The doctor befriended Gavriyl Daniylovich and, when he found out that his friend was looking for a place to live, he offered to rent him a part of his big apartment. Doctor Bervy was very nice to Gavriyl Daniylovich and helped him to get settled in his new place. After her mother's death, the young Olga took over the housekeeping chores: cooking, going to the market to find food, and looking after her little brother, Pyetya.

When Tonya finally heard of her mother's death, it was too late to attend the funeral, but she went to visit her father in Yuzovka. When she got there, she found her sister Olga very sick with the typhoid enteric fever like her mother. In those days there was no medicine that could cure this disease; there was nothing to be done but try to keep the fever down and wait to see if the patient's own body defenses would overcome the infection. Doctor Bervy hoped that Olga's young body would be able to fight the disease better than her mother's had.

Tonya stayed at the hospital for several days and nights to be near her sister,

hoping that she would get better. But Olga became yet another victim of the raging epidemic in the country. Tonya's beloved youngest sister died while she was with her at the mill hospital. She was devastated by this loss. Gavriyl Daniylovich and Tonya buried Olga next to her mother in the town's old cemetery.

For Gavriyl Daniylovich, the refuge in Yuzovka had turned into a place of double tragedy; in a space of a few months, he had lost his wife and youngest daughter. Fyedor Vasylyevich Bervy was very supportive and a good friend to him during that time. Then, in the summer, both Tanya and Nyusya came to stay with their father from Kharkov. Tanya had just graduated from courses in dentistry, and Doctor Bervy found a position for her at the mill hospital as a dentistry intern. Nyusya stayed there during summer vacation and returned to Kharkov in the fall to continue her studies in the Kharkovsky Medical Institute.

During that summer, Tanya met Lev Myronovich Tatarsky, whose nickname was Lyeve, who was courting her intensively. The beautiful Tanya fell very much in love with the slender and attractive young man. They appeared to be the perfect couple, just made for each other. Soon they began to talk about marriage, but deeply religious Gavriyl Daniylovich was not very happy with his daughter's choice. Lyeve was a Jew, and that meant that they could not be married according to Christian Orthodox tradition. But Gavriyl Daniylovich's attitude could not mar their relationship and Tanya and Lyeve's love continued to blossom.

Being new in town, Gavriyl Daniylovich was still able to find some clients for tailoring, but being unknown in town, he was barely able to provide for himself and his little son Pyetya. In those hard times, people looked first for food; clothing was secondary. The illnesses and funerals had added to his burden, and everything in Yuzovka reminded him of the tragic loss of his loved ones. News from Slavyansk was reassuring; the wave of reprisals against the craftsmen had diminished. Gavriyl Daniylovich knew that in his hometown, where he was known, he could count on his reputation as a master tailor. There he would have enough customers to provide a living for himself and his little son Pyetya, and he could help his daughter Nyusya until she graduate from Medical Institute. So he decided to return to his hometown. He hired a big wagon, loaded all his belongings and tailoring equipment into it, and headed for Slavyansk.

Tanya remained in Yuzovka to finish her internship in dentistry. Nyusya continued her studies in Kharkov, and Tonya was teaching in Nikitovka. Gavriyl Daniylovich hadn't heard any news yet from his oldest son Nikolay and his family who were living in Taganrog. But he worried most about his middle son Ivan who had enlisted as a volunteer in the White Army of General Vrangel. Since then, no one knew what had become of him.

When in the summer of 1921 Gavriyl Daniylovich returned to his hometown, he found out that his two homes had been taken over by the town's new Town Soviet government. The same as it had happened to other properties that had been abandoned by their owners, or to those that were considered too large for private ownership and were confiscated by the new government.

However, the most surprising for Gavriyl Daniylovich was the story his brother Stepan told him about what had happened when he stopped in Slavyansk on his way back from Yuzovka after bringing the family of his brother there.

"As instructed by you," his brother told him, "I went to your home to take for safekeeping to the village of Nikolskoye all that remained in your house. When I got to Slavyansk, I found that somebody was living in your house. I went to the back porch and knocked on the door. Your former apprentice, Styopa Bolotov, opened it. He recognized me and rudely inquired, 'What do you want? Your brother ran away from his house. Now I live here.'

'My brother didn't run away.' I answered him, 'They had moved to another town. I came to take what is left in the house and bring it to the village for safekeeping.'

Styopa Bolotov looked at me with an air of insolence and boldly declared, 'I live here now! All property of tailor Berezhnoy has been confiscated—in the name of the people. Nothing can be taken from here. Now it all belongs to us,' and he pronounced proudly, 'pro-le-ta-ri-ans!'

I didn't dare to question this declaration of right to my brother's property. I stood a few moments on the steps of the house and thought: "After all, my brother indeed abandoned his house and escaped from his hometown. Perhaps, in the few days that I was on the road, the authorities indeed confiscated my brother's property and allowed Styopa Bolotov to live there. How I have to know it? I can't complain to the authorities and tell them that my brother was afraid. They would start asking questions about where he is now—then I will do more harm to my brother than leaving everything as it is..."

I looked at Styopa Bolotov and politely told him, 'Well, take good care of the property so that all will be in order when my brother comes to retrieve it.'

Styopa Bolotov laughed, 'Ha-ha-ha... Let him come back! He will be arrested on the spot!' His ringing laughter accompanied me, as I slowly walked toward the gate, 'Ha-ha-ha, ha-ha-ha..'

When Gavriyl Daniylovich heard this story from his brother, he decided to let the things remain as they were—complaining to the Soviet authorities was out of the question—it would only bring reprisals against him. "Thank God," he thought, "no one can take away my skills or my hands. That's all that I need to start working again..."

Gavriyl Daniylovich found room and board with Anna Petrovna, whose maiden name was Boyko. She was from a family that resided a long time in Slavyansk, and her brother and sister also lived not far from her. She was the widow of the local butcher Ploskogolovy, whom Gavriyl Daniylovich had known quite well. Her house had only three rooms and a large kitchen. It had not been taken away by the Soviet authorities. She lived there with her two sons. The oldest, Dmytry, nicknamed Mytya, was in his early teens, and the youngest, Zhorzh, was about the same age as Pyetya. Anna Petrovna had a hard time without a breadwinner providing for the family, so she took Gavriyl Daniylovich in as a boarder. She allowed him to sew in the big kitchen that had an entrance that his customers could use. She also gave him use of the smaller, furnished room where he and his small son Pyetya slept.

Gavriyl Daniylovich had brought a few pieces of furniture and some household items and all his tailoring equipment and tools back from Yuzovka. He put his big tailor's table, called a *katok*, and his old Singer sewing machine against the wall near two windows in the kitchen, and he was ready to start his tailoring business once more.

The news that Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy had returned spread quickly in Slavyansk, and in no time he had plenty of work. Having a reputation as one of the best

master tailors in town, Gavriyl Daniylovich didn't need to invite customers; one by one they were at his door placing their orders. But now, most of them came from the new ruling hierarchy because all of his prosperous old customers had either disappeared from the town, or had been imprisoned as "enemies of the revolution." Most of those who remained had become impoverished, when all their possessions and property were taken away from them—all "in the name of the people." These goods ended up in the hands of the new masters, the Bolsheviks and the Soviet officials, who had come to power. Reflecting upon what had happened to so many of his friends, customers, neighbors, and acquaintances (who had been either shopkeepers or government employees, or just prosperous town citizens who had been able to accumulate some wealth by living within their means), Gavriyl Daniylovich knew that his most precious possessions were his trade and his skillful hands that nobody could take away from him.

Soon Gavriyl Daniylovich became so busy with his tailoring business that he made the agreement with his landlady that she also would look after little Pyetya. And Anna Petrovna was quick to recognize Gavriyl Daniylovich's potential as a good breadwinner. She saw that he had a full load of work sufficient to feed them all. Their mutual needs played a major part in their eventual decision to get married, which they consecrated in the only church that remained open, the one at the cemetery, because the *Sobor*, the town's cathedral, had been closed and converted to Workers' club.

Then Gavriyl Daniylovich began to take care of and feed his new family. He used to say, "The needle fed my large family before; the needle will now feed us, too!" He had to work harder to feed the family of five than only Pyetya and himself, but he was never afraid of work. And once again, with curved back, he sewed all day long, either sitting cross-legged on the *katok*, tailoring by hand, or sitting at the sewing machine. Only when he drafted patterns with chalk directly onto cloth spread out on the *katok*, or when he ironed with his heavy charcoal-fueled iron, could he straighten his back and have some relief from his curved position.

One Sunday, early in the morning, Gavriyl Daniylovich went to church at the cemetery, which had not yet been closed by Soviet authorities. On the steps of the church sat a beggar, an old half-paralyzed man who extended a trembling hand. His legs trembled, too. Gavriyl Daniylovich stopped to give him alms and recognized in him his good customer, a former shopkeeper Rostovtsev, who had signed the Promisory Note and guaranteed the bank the money Gavriyl Daniylovich needed to build his second house. Although the Town Soviet had confiscated his houses before he could finish paying for them, Gavriyl Daniylovich felt that he owed Rostovtsev for the trust he had shown him. From that day on he had helped the old man with whatever he could afford; the last donation he made paid for the man's funeral.

Gavriyl Daniylovich found out from some of his customers that his former neighbor Belichenko had moved his family to the village of Bantushevo, where he became the Chairman of the Village Soviet right after the Reds took over. But Belichenko was arrested after it became known that he belonged to a revolutionary faction called the Social Revolutionaries, who were considered enemies of the Bolsheviks, and he was deported to the concentration camp in Siberia. Soon after his arrest, his wife, Maria Ivanovna, died, leaving their two children orphans.

Hearing this news, Gavriyl Daniylovich reflected, "To succeed these days, it's not

enough to be a revolutionary—one had to be the right kind of revolutionary—Belichenko was the wrong kind, he had his ideas and stood by them. And he was sent to Siberia for it. But Styopa Bolotov—he doesn’t have any ideas—he just repeats the slogans like a parrot and is rewarded for it by the Bolsheviks...”

## Cross And Needle

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated. by W. K. Hyne, Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

When Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy returned to Slavyansk, as he expected, he had right away plenty of work.<sup>1</sup> Some of the first orders he received were from customers who were dissatisfied with the outfits made for them by the newly established Tailoring Cooperative Workshop. All of them complained about the sloppy workmanship on garments sewn for them there. Some even brought items that had been made there and begged him to fit them properly and make alterations, because the outfits looked as if they had been made to fit someone else’s figure.

Then he heard from some of his former apprentices, who worked at the Tailoring Cooperative, that things there were not going too well. This happened because the Co-op had several tailors who called themselves “master tailors” but didn’t even know how to draft patterns to fit their customers. Instead they cut the cloth by a set of patterns supplied by a government office in charge of all tailoring cooperatives in the region.<sup>2</sup>

One of his former apprentices said, “You should only see the waste and pilferage that is going on! They should have closed the cooperative a few months after it opened, because it wasn’t making a profit. But no one cares because the manager decides how much money to send to the Regional Government Tailoring Cooperatives Office each week. And nobody there checks on anything that goes on in the tailor shop or how much the Cooperative takes in from the customers. The workers just receive their established pay from the regional office.”

One day, Gavriyl Daniylovich had an unexpected visit from his former apprentice, Styopa Bolotov, who had never learned his trade well enough to be a good apprentice. Nevertheless, he was now manager of the Tailoring Cooperative Workshop located at Soborny Square. Gavriyl Daniylovich, as usual, sat cross-legged on the *katok* basting in a sleeve onto a jacket. Comrade Bolotov, as he was now called, positioned himself near the sewing machine in front of his former master.

In contrast to his previous hostile visits<sup>3</sup> before Gavriyl Daniylovich had fled to Yuzovka, when the newly transformed revolutionary, apprentice Styopa, had intimidated his former master with all kinds of threats, this time comrade Bolotov started conversation in a very conciliatory way.

After a few introductory conventional phrases asking about his former master’s health, comrade Bolotov quickly came to the point of his visit, “I came to invite you, Gavriyl Daniylovich, to join our Tailoring Cooperative. You have probably already heard

that we have many qualified tailors and apprentices there, so it would be in your best interests to join a good workers team."

"No, Styopa, I will not join your Co-operative," calmly but determinedly answered Gavriyl Daniylovich. "You don't need an old man there. You said yourself that you have many qualified tailors without me."

"Believe me, it would be greatly to your advantage," insisted comrade Bolotov, "Eight hours of work, then time off, no need to work late into the night to finish work for some demanding customer. In the Cooperative, we set the time when the item will be ready, not the customers. Also, for you there will be no special income tax to pay, which is imposed on private tradesmen. And the authorities will see that you became one of the workers laboring for the Cooperative, rather than for yourself. Nowadays, of course, Gavriyl Daniylovich, politics take first place."

No matter how much Styopa Bolotov tried to persuade his former master to join the Tailoring Cooperative, it was like beating his head against a wall, for the stubborn old man was unyielding. He didn't even stop basting the sleeve as if it were more important than this conversation.

"No, Styopa, I already told you, I will not join your Co-operative. You used to work for me, and you know that I did not allow politics in my shop. The Czar might have been good or bad, but you never heard anything about it in my place."

"Yes, but what about the Soviet government?" interrupted Styopa.

"What about it?" Asked Gavriyl Daniylovich. And without waiting for an explanation, he answered his own hypothetical question, "Certainly, taxes imposed on private tradesmen are oppressive, but meanwhile, I still earn bread for my family." Then he raised his eyes from his work and added, "But, as regards working eight hours a day, it is too much for a man of my age. You see, here I can work for a while on these sleeves, and then I can lie down and have a little nap for an hour or so. Sometimes, I might not even finish one buttonhole in a whole day, and nobody complains about it," he exaggerated a little.

"We will fix up a cot, or perhaps a nice couch for you," Styopa said accommodatingly. "And, anyway, you will be only taking measurements from the customers, making fittings when they come in, and guiding the cutters in adjusting the patterns to the customers' measurements. You see, you will have plenty of time to rest in between... You don't even have to take a needle into your hand or sew on a machine!"

"That would not be working," Gavriyl Daniylovich interrupted him. "I couldn't do it that way. In any case, what would I earn?"

"Don't you worry about that, we will see that you are fairly treated, Gavriyl Daniylovich!" hurriedly answered Styopa with animation, hoping that his former master was ready to bite at the worm he dangled on his hook. Then—to be sure not to lose his perceived advantage in reasoning with the old man—he suddenly changed his persuasions from the sweet promises to fear tactics, "But, the main thing is the income tax imposed on private tradesmen. It will ruin you. Have you seen the new regulations? They will swallow up all private enterprises!"

"God is merciful," his old master calmly answered, "I will always earn a piece of bread for my family, and there is a well in the courtyard where the water is always clean and fresh."

Then Styopa Bolotov felt he needed to apply the more radical revolutionary

methods of persuasion on the old man so he told him: "Well, there's still another thing. You used to be a man of property. You owned two brick houses, each two storied ones. And in your workshop you employed a master tailor, a foreman, and two young apprentices. All those things are looked upon now as 'exploitation of the workingmen.' Don't forget that you will be declared a *lishenets*<sup>4</sup> for all of that! And then, don't you forget, your children went to gymnasiums and universities and you paid for all of them..."

Styopa stopped for a while collecting in his mind all kinds of sins with which he could blackmail his former master. Then, with an air of self-righteousness, he reproached the old man, "There is something more I want to mention to you, that's about that icon." And with a sharp gesture he extended the whole arm at the corner where it hanged. "You must take it down right away, Gavriyl Daniylovich, because all kinds of people come to you as customers, and that's religious propaganda you are promoting..." As he glanced at the ancient image while pointing at it irreverently with his finger, the dark face of the Savior looked down at Styopa with gentle eyes, and it seemed to whisper to him, "Take heed—you are straying from my ways." Styopa looked away from the icon and shrank back. For a few seconds, he looked as a puppy that has suddenly fallen into the water. It was obvious that his conscience was not yet completely smothered. It woke up for a moment and sharply pricked his hardening heart.

Gavriyl Daniylovich silently put aside his work, looked at his former apprentice over the top of his steel-rimmed spectacles, which were perched on the very tip of his nose, then he got up from his cross-legged position and got down from the *katok*. Only then he began to speak calmly and resolutely, as if Styopa had not reproached or offended him, "Listen you disbeliever, I was born a Christian, I have lived a long life with Him, and I shall die praising His name. Don't you dare speak to me about removing my icons. Your mind has become muddled. I am the master in my house, and that icon is here to stay."

Then he changed the subject but still continued to lecture his former apprentice, "As for the past, it is not for you to talk to me like that, Styopa. You spent seven or almost eight years with me. You saw for yourself that I worked alongside you, yes, even harder than you. Because, when you had worked the hours for which you were paid, you had your time off, but not me. How many times I sat up the whole night long to finish work due the next day."

Gavriyl Daniylovich stopped to catch his breath and then continued, "You say that I had built houses. Yes, I built them by my own hard work and my reputation as a master tailor and an honest man whom the local merchants and the bank could trust to lend money to build those houses. I have never underpaid, nor cheated, nor robbed anyone in order to build them. They were taken from me before I could finish repaying my loan. Besides, those houses have already gone to the Soviet government, and it's no use remembering them. I don't even think about them. What's done is done and can't be undone."

Styopa stood there stunned by his former master's courage in opposing all of his persuasions and threats. He felt very uncomfortable, but there was no way he could stop him.

And Gavriyl Daniylovich continued, "Did you say I educated my children? Yes, I have educated them. It was my duty to do it. Am I not my children's father? It is wicked

to reproach me for that!"

Then Gavriyl Daniylovich came closer to Styopa and, looking him straight in the eyes, said, "But, as far as joining the Tailoring Cooperative, what would I be doing there? When all is said and done, I am still a master tailor here, and my work is appreciated by my customers. But *there*, with the shabby quality of work you do..." He didn't finish the sentence.

Styopa Bolotov knew that what Gavriyl Daniylovich said was perfectly true, but it annoyed him to be reminded that the "old man" was the master tailor and not himself, and he knew that in the Cooperative Workshop were only assistants and apprentices working. Abruptly, with both hands, Styopa pushed in the chest the old man who stood too close to him and angrily said, "You will regret this, Gavriyl Daniylovich!" And he rushed out the door without any further words.

Gavriyl Daniylovich went out onto the porch. In his mind resounded Styopa's reproaching words and now answers that he did not had a chance to tell him flowed readily from his lips, "That disbeliever! The icon disturbed him! Doesn't he remember that I was an Elder of the Church, and it has not been just a year or two, but more than twenty years, that I have served God and the congregation, in what used to be the Cathedral, the very same one that the 'comrades Bolsheviks' have closed now and set up a Workers Club there. The blasphemers! And at another church by the cemetery, they want to open an anti-religion museum."

"There is a rumor in town that they will soon close all the churches in Russia. Ah, well..." He gave a heavy sigh, "It seems that everything will soon come to an end... The Bolsheviks have power and might... But they cannot shut out God the Everlasting, Omnipresent..."

The shaggy old yard dog, Arap, came up wagging his tail, licked his master's slippered feet, then laid his head down on them and gazed up at his master with sorrowful black eyes. "Well, my old *Arapushka*, we are both grown old and weak. It is almost time we retire. Still, we seem to be needed. They insult us, you see, but it seems they cannot get on without us."

Gavriyl Danilovich slowly came down from the porch steps and strolled around the small garden. He didn't feel inclined to work. Thoughts of the past mingled with those of the present, emphasizing the gulf that existed between the full, vital life of his yesteryears and the emptiness of his life today. But however hard life was now, he felt a deep sense of satisfaction in knowing that his long life had not been fruitless.

The scent of the awakening earth and the spring flowers elated him; he loved to see the revival of nature and feel God's beauty in the tender flower petals, and in the fresh green garden. And as he slowly strolled along the garden path he continued to review his life in his mind.

"The houses, they, took them, they are gone. The children, that's a different matter. The oldest, Nikolay—an architect; he builds houses better than mine were. Tanya—she's a dentist; Tonya—is a schoolteacher; Nyusya—will be soon an eye doctor. Only Vanya didn't turn out so well. It's true he's a bookkeeper, but he tipplés, vodka leads to no good. Well, I can't really blame him—for he's been chased around like an unlucky hare by hounds. And all because he joined the White army as a volunteer when he was a lad; he was not quite of age at the time. Even a wise father wouldn't have punished him for that. But now the new rulers take it out on him in every way they can,

investigating his past and dismissing him from jobs."

Gavriyl Daniylovich's thought switched from the living to the dear ones who were gone forever from this life.

"And Shura, my sweet and gentle son, Shura, God rest his soul, he had been in the White army, too; he was a true patriot who lost his life defending Russia from the Reds. He had died of typhoid fever while recuperating from his wounds at the military hospital in Taganrog and was buried there. My wife went there to see that his funeral was properly done according to Christian Orthodox rites. Then my wife and my daughter, Olga, died shortly after, both in the same year of typhoid fever in Yuzovka and were buried in the old cemetery next to each other. They are all gone—only I and my little son, Pyetya, are left. He must be educated, and then I can rest in peace."

Although saddened and considerably aged during these few tragic years, Gavriyl Daniylovich accepted patiently his destiny as a devoted Christian. Once tall and erect, his back now was curved from long hours spent sitting at the treadle sewing machine or cross-legged on the tailor's table while tailoring by hand. His once dark brown wavy hair had turned gray but was still neatly parted on the side. His bushy eyebrows were now also gray, and deep wrinkles furrowed his forehead. His long moustache was sprinkled with gray, and his long soft beard that was connected by the sideburns to his temples was now silver-gray but still shaped straight at the bottom. He smoked a lot, and the hot ash that often fell on his beard had speckled it with the burned reddish spots.

Gavriyl Daniylovich gazed thoughtfully with brown eyes at the trees covered with white spring flowers and at the paths carpeted with white petals and thought,

"But all this is not mine; it all belongs to my second wife. My dearly departed first wife never divided anything. But as for my second one, she always reminds me, "This is mine and that is yours," although I am the breadwinner.

"No, I could never find another woman as good as my first wife was... I have been fair to my second wife right from the start. I had established with her the same rules as I had with my first wife. I allowed her to manage the money needed for food and other household expenses, and I am responsible for managing and disbursing the money for big expenses such as heating, home repairs, clothing and taxes. This allows us to share in managing the household and gives me enough freedom to help Nyusya until she graduates and for me to have some savings for a rainy day. But my wife is never satisfied with this arrangement. Besides, she favors her two sons in everything, all the while reminding my little Pyetya that he is not her son, making him feel unwanted."

A few days after Styopa Bolotov's visit, Gavriyl Daniylovich received a notice from the Town Soviet stating the increased taxes levied on him as a private craftsman. The income tax was more than three thousand rubles and had to be paid on time. Gavriyl Daniylovich took the news with contempt by reasoning,

"If I sold up everything that I own, even then I would still be in debt. I know that the Tailoring Cooperative wants to have my good name—Master Tailor Berezhnoy—it would be a feather in their hat. Well no matter, I will carry on the fight while I still have strength!"

Gavriyl Daniylovich knew that all the smart people in town came with their orders to him and not to the Cooperative, because their fabric was wasted if they took it there. When the customer brought in material for a three-piece suit, they scarcely got a two-piece out of it, and even that fitted shamefully bad. How many of these workshop-made

suits he had already altered! "I will charge my customers more so I can pay my taxes", he decided.

Shortly after receiving the tax notice, a Town Soviet official arrived, the manager of the Financial Department, himself, comrade Gorbunov. It was not the first time that Gavriyl Daniylovich had made suits for him. He knew that Gorbunov was very particular—he liked to dress well and had a very good taste.

He also knew that Gorbunov valued him because no other tailor had ever fitted him better.

"Good day, Gavriyl Daniylovich," Gorbunov greeted him. "I have come with some rather urgent work for you."

"Good day, Vasyliy Illarionovich," answered Gavriyl Daniylovich with a sorrowful expression on his face and shaking his head. "I am afraid you will have to wait; I have a lot of orders on hand. It has been a fine spring and every one of my good customers wants a new suit."

"Come now, you know me, we are old acquaintances. You know I will treat you fairly, Gavriyl Daniylovich."

"I am afraid it is I that will not treat you fairly, Vasyly Illarionovich. I have to raise my labor costs considerably."

"Why? Has bread become dearer, or needles?" Gorbunov laughingly questioned him.

"Neither the bread, nor the needles have increased in price lately, but your tax notices have got dearer." And Gavriyl Daniylovich drew the fresh tax bill out of his waistcoat pocket and handed it to Vasyly Illarionovich.

The manager of the Finance Department looked at it and smiled, "Oh, oh! Old man, if you sold everything you possess, you would not be able to clear yourself."

"Why should I sell out? I will pay it," Gavriyl Daniylovich answered decisively.

"And how you intend to do that? Rob the state bank?"

"Well, let me explain it. You need a three-piece suit, don't you?"

"That's what I came here for."

"Well, from now on my charge will be five hundred rubles for this work, Vasyliy Illarionovich—I can't do it for any less, if I am to pay my taxes."

"Well, well, Gavriyl Daniylovich, what you would say if I told you that you must continue to charge me at your old price..."

"Two hundred rubles?" the old tailor questioned.

"Yes, two hundred rubles."

"But in that case, I will not be able to make the ends meet!" exclaimed Gavriyl Daniylovich.

"Wait a minute, let me finish," Vasyliy Illarionovich interrupted him, "give me a piece of paper."

Gavriyl Daniylovich tore a clean sheet out of the notebook that he used for writing down details of his customers' orders and handed it to him. Vasyliy Illarionovich swiftly wrote filling half a page, then said, "Have someone else copy this for you, so it will not be in my handwriting. This is an application to the Regional Finance Department to have your income tax lowered on the grounds of ill health and old age. There is a regulation about this, but only they have the authority to lower the taxes. When they inquire in paid before receiving this notice."

"Thank you, Vasyliy Illarionov our office about you, I will personally take care of it. You will pay less tax than you ich, then everything will be as before—the price, I mean..." Gavriyl Daniylovich assured him.

"Yes, but you'll make my suit as soon as possible?" prompted the manager of the Finance Department.

"Can you come to be fitted in three days' time?" Gavriyl Daniylovich replied with a smile.

"Of course, I can!"

"Very well, in a week your suit will be ready."

"Good! That's the way to treat your good customers!" And Vasyliy Illarionovich then explained what details he wanted, what style of buttons, what shape of the lapels and the collar... Gavriyl Daniylovich checked his client's measurements, just in case he might have gained a few pounds, and then they said goodbye, each happy with the other.

"Nothing can be done without God's help, thought Gavriyl Daniylovich, but I won't go to the Cooperative Workshop!"

The summer passed. Everything settled down and was calm. The Tailoring Cooperative worked for themselves and Gavriyl Daniylovich worked for himself. His taxes, thanks to Vasyliy Illarionovich's help, were now lowered. And none of his customers were ever charged five hundred rubles for a suit.

But the life under Soviet rule was full of unexpected happenings, some of them comical, as in the case of his taxes. Others did not make any difference for Gavriyl Daniylovich, as in the case of his voting rights. Before elections were held for Soviet government offices, he received a notice informing him that he had been deprived of voting rights because before the revolution he had owned two brick homes and his own tailor shop, in which he had "exploited a master, a foreman, and apprentices".

"Big deal!" Gavriyl Daniylovich commented. "As a *lishenets* I don't have to go and vote for candidates whose names are on the ballot only because they are Bolsheviks and not because they know how to govern." Then he thought about his son, "It's, however, a different story for Ivan, who is also deprived of voting rights because he was a volunteer in the White Army. It is a tragedy for him, because he cannot find steady work. As soon as they find out that he was a *lishenyets*, they fire him. That's why he started drinking. But vodka does not lead to anything good."

Of course, some of the unexpected happenings were just plain dreadful, like the time the government needed gold in order to pay for the industrial equipment bought from the capitalists countries. This time the government desperately wanted gold. You had to give them gold, even if you were broke! In the cities, towns and in the thousands of small hamlets and villages all over the Russian land, millions of people lived in a state of wild terror. Men and women took off all their rings (even their wedding rings), Christening crosses, earrings, and locket and hid them in the most inaccessible places. They buried them in the ground and plastered them into walls, but still the GPU<sup>1</sup> agents obstinately demanded, "Give us your gold!"

One day Gavriyl Daniylovich's turn came. A GPU<sup>5</sup> agent called on him. The old tailor was sitting cross legged, as usual, on his *katok* with one foot tucked under him, working silently. The GPU agent entered without knocking, pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket and, reading the name on it, inquired, "Which one here is Berezhnoy?"

"I am," answered Gavriyl Daniylovich.

"Get ready, old man, and come along," GPU agent ordered.

"Where to?"

"To the GPU," was the short and simple answer.

There was nothing else to do, but to get ready and obey the agent's order, because Gavriyl Daniylovich knew that he could not refuse to go when summoned by that infamous government institution. So, he just buttoned up his shirt collar, put on his jacket, and followed the agent.

At the GPU they didn't bother to waste words, "Give us your gold, old man!"

"Where am I supposed to have gotten this gold?" asked Gavriyl Daniylovich in astonishment.

"We know where from. You'd better not deny it. Hand it over!"

"I tell you, I have none," replied the old man.

"You had better hand it over at once," they said, "otherwise, it will be the worse for you."

"I am telling you, on my honor, that I have no gold," he insisted.

"You can't deceive us. You built two houses on Kharkovsky Street. You also had a tailoring workshop and exploited your workers. You educated your children at gymnasiums and sent them to universities, and now you pretend you have no gold! Shake your coffers well; you will find some."

Gavriyl Daniylovich was in no doubt as to where this denunciation came from—Styopa Bolotov. "Well," he said, "that's just where the gold went—to the houses, to the schools, to university fees, and to my tailoring business. You should ask the person who informed on me how much money he received from me in gifts over all the holidays, for Christmas and for Easter."

"Nonsense, old man, you are talking through your hat, your houses are proof of it!"

"You should ask..." Gavriyl Daniylovich started, but they did not let him finish.

They ordered very sweetly, "Give us the gold, or you'll be sorry if you don't."

But Gavriyl Daniylovich continued to repeat, "I have no gold and never have had, because it all went to build the houses, to pay for schools for my children, to the business, and to pay my helpers. I always paid them well."

"I will give you until evening," told him the GPU agent sternly. "Think things over well. And don't come back here telling me lies!"

They took him to a cell. The place was full; there were many once well-to-do people there. One cried, another laughed, and another could not hide his intense agitation. Gavriyl Daniylovich greeted them all. Although he was well known to everyone there, they were so preoccupied by their own troubles, or so thoroughly frightened, that none took any notice of him. So, he sat down in a corner on the stone floor and began to pray silently for his children. He didn't think about the gold, for he had none. He always spoke the truth and had never known how to lie.

While he was sitting in the corner praying, the GPU agents searched his home. They questioned his wife demanding that she show them where the gold was hidden. The terrified old woman, trembling from head to foot and crossing herself repeatedly, answered them, "What gold, my dears? We are not robbers."

But the agents ransacked the house, ripping open pillows and feather beds and examined the icons. Then they looked into the shed, went through the garden and the courtyard. They even searched the well, but they could not find any gold.

Late that evening Gavriyl Daniylovich was called back for the interrogation. "Well, old man, we found all the gold at your home," the GPU agent declared convincingly.

"Impossible!" Gavriyl Daniylovich exclaimed.

"Your old woman showed us herself where it was hidden." "Well, then it must have been her own gold."

"What do you mean hers?" the agent asked him.

"Obviously, as I have no gold, there wasn't any of mine, so it must have been my second wife's gold. I don't know all the things she has in her possession," he explained plainly. Then he added, "Let her show me where she was hiding it."

Since the agents could not break the old man with their deception, they resorted to scare tactics, "You know if they find gold at your house, it will go hard with you. If you have deceived us, you will be shot."

"God is merciful..." replied the old man. Gavriyl Daniylovich unbuttoned the collar of his shirt and drew out a cross on a black cord. Then he took out a needle with a long thread, which he always kept stuck in the top left-hand pocket of his waistcoat, and showed them to the Chief of the GPU, who this time was interrogating him, and said proudly, "Cross and needle—there is my gold. You can take the needle. You will never take the cross."

They let Gavriyl Daniylovich go free. They did not take the cross. It was only silver. There were no orders to collect silver at that time.

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1. Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.], "Kryest y ygla" [in Russian], *Vo imya chego?* MS,TS, 1952, 43-46, ed. Olga Gladky Verro. Previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.] "Kryest y ygla" [in Russian], newsp *Rossia*, no.4984 (New York: Rossia Publishing, October 29, 1952) Also as Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.] trans. W.K. Hyne "Cross And Needle," *Christian Democrat*, vol.10, no. 2 Large Family ed, (Oxford, Great. Britain: Catholic Social Guild, Hinckley, Leics: Samuel Walker, printers. & publishers, February 1959), 119-126. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. Additions as recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky. See the chapter "The Tragic Refuge."

3. See the chapters "In Whose Name?" and "My Native Home."

4. A person whose right to vote has been revoked because of an anti-Bolshevik past or present beliefs.

5. GPU - acronym for *Gosudarstvennoye Politicheskoye Upravleniye* - The State Political Office, former CheKa - acronym for *Chresvychaynaya Kommissiya* - Extraordinary Commission that acted as secret police against counterrevolutionaries from 1917-1921.

## The Family Of Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy

By Olga Gladky Verro

As Recounted by Nikolay Nikolayevich Berezhnoy, Vladimir Nikolayevich Berezhnoy and Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Before events of the revolution engulfed the northern part of Russia, Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy moved with his family to the town of Taganrog where he worked for a few years with a reputable architectural contractors company. The two partners who owned the company were very happy with his work, and Nikolay received a good

salary. He was able to afford to live in a nice house, furnish it well, and provide a comfortable living for his family.<sup>1</sup>

But the revolution that began far up north and the civil war that was spreading throughout Russia brought slowly but steadily the dramatic changes in the life of all the people.<sup>2</sup> These changes also occurred in the provincial town of Taganrog located on the shore of the Azov Sea in the southern region of the country.

The Whites retreated steadily from the north and concentrated in the south where they were trying to regroup. At the same time the White Army was undergoing a dramatic change in its composition. There was an increase in lower and higher ranking officers and a steady decline in ordinary soldiers. They hoped to offer a more solid resistance while defending the remaining territory under their control and thus protect themselves and the population from the unrelenting pressure of the Reds. But their efforts were unsuccessful, and they suffered one defeat after another.

Nikolay's younger brother Shura, who enrolled as a volunteer in the White Army, was at that time guarding with his detachment the station of Nikitovka, which was an important railroad junction for the Whites because it had major connections to vital destinations in the South. The Reds often made unexpected strikes on the outskirts of the station, attempting to disrupt the movement of White troops, weapons and ammunition. In one of the strikes, Shura was seriously wounded and was transported to the military hospital in Taganrog, where he contracted typhus and died shortly after his arrival.

Nikolay only found out about Shura when he received a telegram from home notifying him that his mother was coming to Taganrog for Shura's funeral. Being a devout Christian, she wanted her beloved son to be buried according to all the Christian Orthodox traditions. She was relieved that her oldest son Nikolay was there to make all the necessary arrangements. She was comforted by him and by her daughter-in-law, Katya, who were at her side at such a tragic moment in her life.

After Shura's funeral, the situation in Taganrog quickly began to deteriorate. The civil war had already swept across most of the Ukraine and was spreading farther south, to other parts of Russia. The South was inundated with civilian refugees who were fleeing from the advancing Reds. The refugees told horror stories of the atrocities committed by Red bands that were taking the law into their own hands. Some Red bands were notorious for indiscriminate killings not only of the White officers, but also civilians, who were considered to be rich and wealthy, and anyone who was a "somebody" before the revolution: shopkeepers, policemen, clergymen, homeowners, civil servants...

In the early fall of 1919, construction work in Taganrog had stopped completely. Rumors of the atrocities of the Reds quickly contributed to the panic of the civilian population and the military alike. Great numbers of frightened people filled the roads as they fled toward the Black Sea coast, hoping to reach Crimea before the Reds could cut off the narrow passage from the Ukraine. The architectural contractors with whom Nikolay worked in Taganrog made a quick decision to abandon the business and flee with their families. They suggested Nikolay do the same.

There was no need to convince Katya that they should also flee. She was terrified by rumors she had heard from their neighbors. Her fear was reinforced by watching all the people leaving the town on foot, taking with them only what they could carry in hand

carts, or on sleds, or in backpacks, baskets, and bags because no transportation of any kind was available for the civilians.

One night, early in the winter of 1920, Nikolay and Katya gathered all the possessions they could carry and before dawn made their escape on foot, headed west for Maryupol. Nikolay carried a heavy backpack and two bags, and Katya, who was in her last months of pregnancy with their second child, had a basket in one hand and with the other one was holding the hand of their three-years-old son Kotyk<sup>3</sup>, whom she had to pull along to keep pace with her husband.

When they reached the town of Maryupol, they rested for a day and then continued on to the Militopol. There were many people on the road, and they walked much faster than Nikolay and Katya. As they were leaving them behind, some people urged them to walk faster if they didn't want to be overtaken by the Reds.

The last stretch of their journey to Militopol was the hardest. There was a lot of snow and Katya had to pull Kotyk by the hand very hard to make him walk faster. As difficult as it was for them to walk, it was even harder to find a place to stay overnight. In one place vagrant a man robbed them, and took Nikolay's quilted overcoat that he was wearing. Finally, completely exhausted, they reached Militopol. They had to stay there awhile because Katya was due to give birth at any moment. There, on March 4, 1920, shortly after they arrived in Militopol, their second son was born. They named him Vladimir, but they called him Volodya. Nikolay and Katya decided to remain in that town and await their destiny.

Later, when the Reds took the town of Militopol, the family survived the rampage. Many White officers and soldiers managed to destroy their military papers, remove their military uniforms, and dress in civilian clothing before the Reds arrived. The Reds were well aware of this, and so they searched for single men who weren't local residents and didn't have civilian identification papers. These men were arrested on the spot because they were considered beyond doubt to be Whites and were first priority for the executions. Fleeing civilians, especially those with families, were left for later investigations. The Reds were hurrying to push the remaining Whites into the Black Sea area and to surround them before they could organize themselves or take refuge in Crimea.

After the first wave of persecution, Nikolay and Katya were left alone by the new authorities. Katya, who was very religious, placed two candles in front of the icon that she had carried with her during their strenuous journey. She told her husband, "Kolya, come here and pray with me. God was merciful to us. He saved us, so that we will be able to nurture and bring up our sons."

Kolya joined his wife in prayer. But after they finished thanking the Lord, he couldn't stop himself from saying aloud what was on his mind, "The Red devils have too much else to do at this time. Maybe our turn just hasn't come yet..."

Katya looked at him with reproach and said, "Have faith, Kolya, have faith in a merciful God!"

After the birth of their second son, Volodya, Nikolay and Katya waited until fighting between the Reds and Whites came to an end in the southeastern Ukraine, allowing the railroad transportation to partially resume. Nikolay decided that this was the time for them to leave the town of Militopol. Returning to Taganrog was out of the question. There he would have been considered as a "well-to-do" former construction

architect from a known architectural company, who had fled from the Reds with his family, leaving all his possessions behind. The only place for them to return was Slavyansk, where they thought that they could find a temporary place to stay in one of Nikolay's father's houses. There it was also known that he once had a small architectural studio and had done work for local building constructors.

They managed to get in a cattle car on the train going north and traveled for several days. Upon their arrival in Slavyansk, Nikolay couldn't find his father and mother in their home. The neighbors told him that now it was occupied by his father's former apprentice, Styopa Bolotov. They walked to Katya's father's Inn and they found the entrance was guarded by men in Reds uniforms. They didn't dare stop and look inside the courtyard. From there, they proceeded to Katya's Aunt Varya and Uncle Misha's house. There everyone was home.

The encounter was an emotional one. Everyone was overjoyed to see each other alive and well. After the excitement of their reunion abated somewhat, they began exchanging the news about what had happened to them and to other relatives during this short, but despaired time in their lives.

From Aunt Varya and Uncle Misha they found out that Katya's father barely had time to flee after the Reds had seized his inns. Then Aunt Varya carefully told Nikolay about the tragedies his father had suffered in the short period soon after the Reds had occupied the town and after he with his family had fled from Slavyansk to Yuzovka. The hardest for Aunt Varya was to tell him the sad news that his mother and younger sister Olga had died of typhoid fever while they were in Yuzovka. She told him that after burying his wife and daughter, his father had returned to Slavyansk with his small son Pyetya.

After Aunt Varya told him the sorrowful part of the story, she said that the rest, although it was also not very good news, was much easier to tell. As Nikolay had already found out from his neighbors, Aunt Varya confirmed that his father's homes had been confiscated. "Well," concluded Aunt Varya, "your father got married, and now he and Pyetya live in his new wife's house."

Nikolay immediately went to visit his father, who could not believe that his oldest son, from whom he hadn't received any news for a long time, now stood before his eyes. The happiness of their reunion was dimmed by sorrow when his father told him the heartbreaking details of his mother's and sister's illnesses, from which they had no chance to recover. Nikolay knew that his father was a devout believer in God. But he was surprised that the religious beliefs had given his father the strength to accept the tragedy of losing his wife and beloved daughter with such complete resignation to God's will with the biblical patience of Job.

Nikolay told his father what had happened to him and his family, that they had also lost everything and had returned to Slavyansk hoping to find a roof over their heads inside of his father's houses. Gavriyl Daniylovich, with regret, told his son that he had lost his houses to the Soviet government and was now living in the house of his second wife, Anna Petrovna Boyko, the widow of the butcher Ploskogolovy.

He apologetically explained that he couldn't ask his new wife to allow Nikolay's entire family to stay there, because she had two sons who lived with her. Dmitry was a teenager and Zhorzh was about the same age as his son Pyetya. But, if Katya with the children could stay in her aunt's house, Nikolay probably could for a few days sleep with

his brother Pyetya in his bed. Nikolay reassured his father that he shouldn't worry about it, since his wife's aunt Varya and uncle Misha had already told them that they could stay at their house until they found their own place.

Thus, Nikolay, Katya and their sons lived for a while with her aunt Varya, uncle Misha, and their unmarried daughter Polya, and her son, also called Misha. Although the house was not large enough to allow them much privacy, they each had a place to sleep and use of the kitchen for cooking their meals. They also had nice fruit and vegetable gardens. In the courtyard, Uncle Misha had made for his grandson Misha a swing, a horizontal bar, and some other play equipment. For Kotyk and Misha, who were about the same age, it was the perfect place with plenty of space in which to play, climbing up the cherry tree and picking cherries, and spending hours climbing, jumping, and swinging. While living there, Kotyk and Misha became good companions and friends, and Kotyk and Volodya became attached to their maternal aunt Varya and uncle Misha, whom they called Dyedushka and Babushka.

Nikolay was known in town for the work he had done after graduating from technical school. Therefore, shortly after his arrival in Slavyansk in 1920, he quickly found employment with the Town Soviet in the Department of *Gorkomkhos*<sup>4</sup> Office. The department was in charge of maintenance and repairs of government buildings that included all the former government's office buildings, and all the factories, businesses, and private homes that had been confiscated by the Soviets. Most non-residential buildings were adapted for government business and commerce, and private homes were turned into rental apartments, the rent being collected by the Town Soviet rental office. Therefore, Nikolay decided to settle with his family in Slavyansk for the time being.

By that time his younger brother Vanya had come home after serving in the White Army, unfortunately with his military card stamped *byelogvardyeyets*.<sup>5</sup> This made it hard for him to find work. As soon as his military status was checked, he was immediately laid off. Since Nikolay worked in the office of the Towns Communal Property, he was able to put his younger brother to work as a bookkeeper there.

Working in that office Nikolay found to rent a nice single-family house and his family moved from Aunt Varya and Uncle Misha's home to their new place.

The house was not far from October Revolution Street where his father now lived. It was so close to walk there that Nikolay and Katya very often took their sons to visit their grandfather. Gavriyl Daniylovich used to put his small grandson Volodya up on his tailoring table and give him a box of buttons to play with, the same as he used to do with his grandson Kotyk when he was small. But now Kotyk preferred to climb by himself up onto the table, where his grandfather sat cross-legged and hand-tailored the interfacing. Kotyk liked to imitate him by sitting crosslegged next to him and watching what he did. Kotyk thought that his grandfather was a very handsome man, but that he smoked too much. He wondered about the hot cigarette ash that fell on his grandfather's long beard and formed many small burned spots.

During the day, Kotyk preferred to go to play with his new friend Misha in his courtyard and garden on the Number 31 Profintern Street. Although it took more than half an hour to walk across town from where they lived, Kotyk rarely missed a day without going there. He especially loved to play ball and compete with Misha in endurance, speed, and perfection of performance on the sports equipment that Uncle

Misha had built. No wonder that his younger brother Volodya, who at that time was only a two-year-old toddler, later could not recall that Kotyk ever played with him.

One episode from early childhood remained vividly in Volodya's mind. Perhaps it was because he had heard his mother tell the story many times. It happened one spring day after a brief, light rain. The young girl who helped his mother take care of him had spread a blanket on the grass and put him on it to play. That evening he had a very high fever, and the doctor diagnosed it as pneumonia. They placed him on a pile of pillows, elevating his head high above his chest and cooled his forehead. The doctor advised his mother that, if he passed the crisis that would occur in about two hours, he would be fine—if not, there was very little hope for his survival.

"Well," his mother used to finish the story, "Thank God, he survived!"

While still working in Slavyansk for the Town Communal Property Office, Nikolay found a new position with the Department of Industrial Development of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which recruited building engineers to work on various construction projects at industrial sites owned by the state.

"Industrialization" was the slogan of those days. People and resources were mobilized like in wartime for the enormous countrywide enterprise. Once a project was finished at one site, the engineers, technicians, and workers were moved to the next place where a new factory was to be constructed. This job paid better than in Slavyansk, but it was a nomadic life that didn't allow the families to put down the roots in any one location and involved constantly moving from one town to another. However, Nikolay considered this to be a good and steady work that allowed Katya to stay home and take care of their sons and household.

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1. Nikolay Nikolayevich Berezhnoy and Vladimir Nikolayevich Berezhnoy [also spelled Wladimir Bereschnoy in Canada], audiocassette and telephone (Toronto, ONT, September, 1993).

2. See the chapter "Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy."

3. Nickname for Nikolay.

4. *Gorkomkhos* – acronym for *Gorodskoye Kommunalnoye Khosyaistvo*, the Town's Communal Property.

5. Serviceman of the White guard, but the name was coined to anyone who served in the White Army during the Civil War in Russia.

## Medieval Execution

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

After the revolution, the civil war started gradually as a movement to save Russia.<sup>1</sup> The clashes between the Reds and Whites polarized the population. In every family came the moment when a decision had to be made which side they were on—were they for the Soviets or for Russia? There was much confusion in the news about what was happening around the country. The railroad station of Nikitovka was a crossing point for the trains coming from north to south and from east to west and

news from all over the country was received through passengers and railroad workers. The station was a valuable strategic point for both the Reds and the Whites, and changed hands several times.

I remember vividly what happened during one of the few days when the Reds occupied Nikitovka. It was in the middle of October, and the director of our gymnasium announced an unscheduled recess for students until the situation calmed down. On the second day of vacation I strolled pensively along the railroad tracks with sad, unclear thoughts. In my young mind I tried to understand why the Reds arrested and executed several well-known, respected citizens and railroad employees, some of whom my family and I knew very well. They were decent people who had never harmed anyone.

I came to a woodsy grove along the railroad tracks, a place I liked to go as a boy to play, and went deeper into the thicket and sat on a stump. Flocks of crows flew over the grove cawing loudly and distracted me for a while. Then there was silence, and everything around me felt strangely unreal. I observed as a yellow leaf fell slowly to the ground; after awhile the faint rustle of some small animal caught my attention and through the yellow and orange leaves above me the leaden autumn sky weighed heavily on my spirit and brought with it an ineffable feeling of sadness...

Suddenly I heard, far away, the clanking sound of metal that quickly increased in intensity. I rose from the stump and saw a shunting engine coming from the station. As it came closer I saw that it displayed the Red flag and pulled only one freight car. "A revolutionary train!" I thought, and sat back down on the stump. The locomotive was traveling fast, but as soon as it entered the grove, it slowed, then stopped so close to me that I could see the engine's smokestack.

I again stood and was about to leave my refuge to see what was happening when some instinct stopped me from moving. "The Reds!" I thought. "It's better that I keep quiet so I don't reveal my presence here." I sat down once more, but with cautious curiosity observed what was going on through the tree branches.

Several men in black leather jackets jumped out of the freight car onto the graveled railroad embankment. Then somebody pushed out of the car other men, dressed in common clothing with their hands tied behind their backs. "Prisoners", I guessed and counted, "One, two, three... six,... ten, eleven.."

The men in black leather jackets held revolvers in their hands and forced the prisoners inside a rectangle formed by a stack of new railroad planks coated with tar and then barricaded them in with some wooden snow fences that had been stored nearby. After that, they rolled two metal barrels out of the car and poured petroleum all over the planks and fences. In a few moments I saw flames shooting high above the treetops.

Terrifying screams of horror resounded from the burning hell. Then the screams of the unknown prisoners being burned alive changed to faint but macabre and terrifying groans. Close to the ground the air was filled with the cloying smells of petroleum, burning tar, clothing, and flesh...

For a short time the men in black leather jackets observed the fire, but did not wait for the fire to subside. They climbed back into the car, and the engine pushed it back to the station.

I stayed in my hiding place for some time, stunned by what I had witnessed. Shuddering with horror, I felt numb, like I wasn't even alive. I tried to move my legs but

they would not obey me. My mind refused to comprehend what had just happened...

Dazed and confused, I wandered along the railroad tracks for the rest of the day.

When I returned home that evening, feeling jaded and exhausted, my father was telling the news that earlier in the day eleven White officers dressed in civilian clothing had been trying to find a train going south, where the Whites held their positions.

Suddenly they were seized by the Reds and taken away.

"They burned them all alive..." I whispered. Then a painful scream erupted from my young chest, "I saw it! I saw it happen in the grove!"

The whole family was shocked by my revelation. Hearing that his son had witnessed the execution appalled my father. He tightly embraced me as if he was trying to squeeze the terrifying experience out of me. He was able to ask only, "In whose name was this medieval execution done? In who's name?"

That time the Reds did not stay in Nikitovka long enough to make any further reprisals, but what they had done was enough to scare the population and demonstrate what would happen when they came back again.

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1. Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhaylov, pseud.) "Octyabr 1918" *Vo ymya chego?* [in Russian] part IV, MS, TS, 1967, trans. and ed. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Also previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky, (O. Mikhaylov, pseud.) "Vo ymya chego?" part IV, [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia*, No. 7787 (New York: Rossia Publishing, March 3, 1967). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## The Noble Hearts

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

I remember my youth,<sup>1</sup> my friends and our noble hearts full of enthusiasm and spirit of sacrifice we had to save Russia from the Red terror. It is so vivid in my mind that I could see clearly, as if it was only yesterday—a small group of gymnasium students in a big classroom, some sitting on the benches, the others on the teacher's desk and on the windowsills. Notwithstanding the critical situation and the acuteness of a question that was troubling all of us, our deliberation had a character of a peaceful discussion rather than of a formal meeting. That's how a blond, blue-eyed Andrey Kozhan was always able to organize and keep any of our gatherings go smoothly.

Andrey, who was by birth from a simple peasants-workers family, conceived hatred for the Bolshevism from the first days of Revolution. Any time when the question about the fight of Whites and Reds was coming up in a discussion, Andrey quietly dissuaded the most ardent defendants of the Reds. Even the teacher of Russian language, Stanislav Semyenovitch, who decided to conduct Red propaganda among the gymnasium students, was once so snubbed off by his student that he never got into a political arguments in his presence.

That day a discussion was called forth by the new atrocity committed yesterday by the "Red-skinned," as we, the students, called Bolsheviks. By pure chance I witnessed

the execution of eleven White officers by the Reds who temporarily were occupying our railroad station of Nikitovka. Andrey asked me to tell my friends about the horror, the terrible ordeal and suffering that these men had to endure before their death.<sup>2</sup>

I told my friends that on that warm autumn Sunday morning I went out after breakfast for a walk. It was nice to be alone and contemplate, to collect my thoughts. As I was walking toward the Magdalinovsky grove, on my mind were recent tragic events that happened since the Reds occupied Nikitovka—the arrests and executions of people that our parents and all of us knew and respected.

I was reflecting on how good it would be if the world could be in such order that the people wouldn't have any sorrows and that the natural end of life would be without pain. But those were only dreams because I knew that it was impossible to have such world. I entered the grove with my dreams and wondered for some time in the woods, then sat on the stump to rest. Everything was peaceful and quiet.

Then suddenly my peaceful contemplation was interrupted by the arrival of a locomotive displaying the red flag and with only one freight car. I quickly realized that it was commanded by the Reds. Several men dressed in commissars' uniforms jumped out of the car and two others were pushing out the men who had their hands tied in the back. The men were falling down on the embankment hurting themselves, but not even one of them emitted a sound. I counted eleven prisoners.

Commissars had plenty of weapons: rifles, revolvers, machinegun, cartridge belts, and grenades—everything necessary to exterminate life. Shouting and profanity of a kind that I as a lad never heard before were coming out from the hurrying commissars. It is known that dirty deeds are done in a hurry and so it was happening here.

I told my friends what was happening minute by minute during this horrible execution. How the commissars carefully rolled out two big barrels with petroleum. How the prisoners were assembled in a group, encircled with the snow fence, poured over with petroleum and set on fire.

I concluded the story by saying, "The prisoners burned taking with them great secret of courage, but even under the threat of fire they didn't answer one word to the questioning commissars. Only the terrifying screams of horror resounded from the burning hell."

Like everybody at the station my friends heard about the White officers who were arrested at the station while they were trying to board the train going south probably trying to reach their units fighting on the River Don. But they didn't know all the details that I told them. When I finished, the students remained sitting quietly stricken by the horror of the brutal execution. Heavy burden fell on their hearts. Their eyes were cast down. Silence rained in the room. Someone emitted a deep sigh.

"Here, my friends," concluded Andrey Kozhan, "one more atrocious incident committed by the Reds. What we are going to do? Be quiet and wait for more atrocities or are we going to join the White Army units fighting on the Don?"

My good friend Vadim Kuzenko took out a cigarette and lighted it; then he got up, walked across the room and stopped near Andrey. "Let's not make a decision the Bolshevik's way," he suggested, "let's not vote. Let our conscience tell each of us what to do. If anyone wants to know, I am going to join the White Army on the Don. Tomorrow at ten o'clock there is a train going to Taganrog and from there I can reach the Whites by foot. It is even better to do it alone. "Red-skinned" probably wouldn't catch or detain

you."

"You are right, Vadim," I replied, "They also wouldn't touch the two of us—we are only boys! Who can pick on us? We always can say that we are traveling home, or to relatives. I will be there with you at ten. Maybe we can travel in different cars, if you are afraid."

"What you think about me? Going into the Army and be afraid to travel together?" Vadim replied.

Boris Minayev was sitting silently sunk in thoughts. He looked as if he didn't even hear the words of his friends. Andrey knew the reason for his silence and wanting to change his friend's state of mind, asked him, "What? Is it difficult to solve this problem? Boris, believe me, nobody is trying to force you to go against your will. We know that you are with us in spirit. There is no obligation for you to be in the White Army. We all know how your departure to Don would affect your ailing parents. We all also know how your girlfriend Lidia Talimova would suffer. We look upon you as our dear friend, but no one is forcing you to go into the Army."

"Do not make a decision the Bolshevik's way," Vadim repeated his preferred phrase. "I decided, tomorrow at ten I am departing. I just want to know who also is going to join the White Army, but I don't want to make out of this a vote."

"Idea!" I shouted. "Boris will remain here as a messenger! We will notify him when we shall depart to join the Army, mail him our addresses and keep contact through him."

"Gentlemen," Boris replied calmly, "I am joining the White Army. I am only thinking how I could prepare my mother and father. About Lidia I don't want even to think. Her young life should also be dedicated to fight for Russia. Maybe we together hand in hand will be fighting for the salvation of the Russian people."

Suddenly Mikhail Volkov vocalized the idea that probably was on everyone's mind, "Gentlemen, and if among us is a stool-pigeon? What you think will come out of all our idea if it will be known to the Reds? Don't you think that I'm afraid. I am telling you ahead of time that I am joining the White Army. My idea had ripened already when the Reds have shot my father only because he was a Station Master. And today for me was only a last push to carry out this decision."

Everyone looked at each other strictly in the eyes. The new question scared everybody. Some even shivered nervously. No one wanted to give his life senselessly. All thought, as did I, "To die for the liberation of Russian people in fighting against the Reds, is all right. I am willing to die for a cause. But to be killed as a homeless dog because he is being betrayed? No!"

"If you think about me," Yasha Malobrodsky said suddenly, "I am also joining the White Army!"

"You, a Jew, are joining the Whites?" Vadim asked. "You know well how *byelogvadyeytsy*<sup>3</sup> say: "Kill the Jews, and save Russia!"

"I know that, but I am against the Bolsheviks."

"Think about it until it is not too late. You will find it difficult as a Jew to be in the White Army. With the Bolsheviks you will be treated well," Vadim suggested.

"Oh, no, Vadim. I want to be with my friends."

"Ah! You want to do it only for this reason? No, Mister Malobrodsky, there is no way for you to go with us," replied Vadim. "But it will be a shame if you resulted to be a stool-pigeon. But we are ready for it..."

The discussion took the unpleasant turn. Everybody knew that Vadim was inveterate anti-Semitist. And all also knew that Malobrodsky always tried to show that Jews are not like it was common for many people to think about them.

These discussions jarred on the nerves of the students, and Andrey Kozhan decided to stop this and called loudly, "Gentlemen, each of us has to prepare our parents, our departure should not be considered as running away. Therefore, I think we need now to go home to have enough time to discuss it. Good bye, friends, it's lunch time; I am leaving."

Everybody hurried toward the door and walked home either alone or with some friend. Everyone was sad. Probably everyone was thinking, as was I, "Farewell gymnasium classrooms, farewell dear place of youthful games and candid joyful gaiety, of first flashes of love; farewell the nest so carefully built by our parents, and maybe good bye life..."

I came on time for lunch. At the table mother and father were discussing the execution of the eleven officers burned by the Reds recalling all the details that I told them yesterday. Although the execution was done in secrecy, everyone in Nikitovka knew about it and it arouse great indignation.

I kept quiet. Only after the meal, when Father began to smoke, I told him, "Papa, I have to talk to you."

Father was surprised and worried. "Let's go in my office," how he called his special space in the living room. "We can talk there better." We silently walked across the large room. Father sat on the sofa, which was unusual, and I sat on the armchair.

"Well, my dear Papa, I decided to join the White Army. In fact, today a small group of students met in the Gymnasium and most of my friends decided to join the White Army. It is impossible to live like this. Bolsheviks must be annihilated.

Yesterday, as you know, I witnessed the killing of eleven officers, the day before we witnessed the killing of engineer Goryainov and his family and plundering of his home. A few days ago Mikhail Volkov's father was killed only because he was a Station Master. What can we expect tomorrow? Everything is falling, all moral principles on which our society existed for centuries, all laws, culture, even monuments, all is being destroyed... I don't know what is waiting for our family, for you, for Mother, sisters and my little brother, what is waiting for me. But I don't want to wait for it silently."

"*Rostik*, but you are not seventeen yet—too soon to die."

"Even the babies are dying, Papa. I am capable of holding a gun in my hands and to defend not only my life but also the life of our family and of Russian people."

Father got up, walked silently across the room. "Have you thought thoroughly about your decision? Aren't you attracted by the shining shoulder straps of the uniform? Remember, the war is not a gymnasium's parade!"

"Papa, I'm sorry for giving you hard time, but you and Mama should understand that youth must become actively involved in this fight today because tomorrow it could be too late."

"Are you imagining clearly what the war is? Can I, the Father, give you consent for your death?"

"And if tomorrow some commissar would kill me as a homeless dog? Maybe with the price of thousands like me, will be bought happiness of all our people, including our family."

"Logically you are right. But you should understand, Orest, that for me, as a Father, is not easy now to tell you 'Yes'"

"Papa, you can easily do this. Just turn away from me for a moment and look far away."

We remained in silence for a moment, then my father said, "I think, maybe you are right... and I am saying 'Yes.' But with Mama I will talk myself. I am happy that I brought up a son like you. I am happy that you decided to join the White Army, but at the same time it is very difficult for me to part with you and to think, God forbid... your death would bring us eternal grief. Orest, you should understand that it is very difficult for me."

"Oh, Papa, I promise to live until all Bolsheviks are annihilated."

"I will pray God to protect you, my dear." Father embraced me and added, "Remember only that the war is not a holiday."

And I left allowing him to convince my mother. I had a lot to do. The most important was to see maybe for the last time the one about whom I was thinking day and night, whose image was clear and pure, the one who made my heart beat faster... She was my first love, pure and chaste. She was my life of youth, intelligent and beautiful. Her name was Lyubov, which means "love" and it combined her name with my feelings toward this wonderful girl.

I often called her "love to the second power." And when Lyuba, as I called her for short, was telling me that this was not enough, I was increasing it to love in the third power, fourth power and so on until the power was becoming of infinite degree and I was given permission for a kiss. Our happiness was already assured. Our lives were already intertwined with pure bright feelings and the future appeared to be shining with beauty and certainty, not being settled down on a vulgar coziness.

But now the hour arrived when life became distorted through the prism of Russian revolution and could, hopefully for short time, sharply change its course, or at least change further peaceful perspectives, or maybe completely destroy them. I never talked with Lyuba about revolution, about Whites or Reds, or about becoming a soldier to defend one side or the other. But I was always thinking that my years were coming closer to the moment when life would require from me a direct first-hand participation in a fight. And I definitely would fight now against the Reds.

But why explain this to Lyuba? I don't expect any conflict with her on this matter. It is impossible that she, a daughter of an engineer, a student in a gymnasium, would be defendant of Bolsheviks. I associated her with all clean, bright, and beautiful, and the Bolsheviks, with all dirty, bloody, and ugly.

To reach the coal mine where Lyuba lived I was able to catch the cargo train. Then I walked briskly on the railroad tracks, passed the mine and reached the miners' hamlet. The path of the alley leading to the house of engineer Tcherednichenko was covered with leaves. "Nobody is taking care of the alley, I thought. So many fallen leaves and nobody to remove them. Revolution..."

Yes, on the coal mine Communism was on the loose. One could notice it by the disorder, and by the arrogant tone of women's utterings:

"It's enough to oppress the working class!"

"You know, dear brothers, there's freedom!"

"Even if there is no food now, we are not going to work and will not allow our husbands go into the mines!"

"The coal is not needed by the revolution! Those who need it should themselves go into the mine. But us, we have worked enough!"

Passing through the mine only confirmed the consequences of this distorted perception of a concept of "freedom" by the "working class" not willing to work any more—the mine was not working for some time.

I came to Lyuba's house; it looked empty. No one answered to the bell at the front door. I decided to try the back door and walked through the courtyard. I was impressed by the quietness in the yard and got on the alert. "Something happened in this house," I thought. "Really, the stable is open and there are no horses. The Reds probably took them away."

I came to the back door. Here also I had to knock long time waiting for the sound inside. And when I was ready to leave, I heard light steps behind the door and then a clank of an iron hook that was used to lock the door.

"Ah, that's you, Orest?" Lyuba asked with an artificially sounding surprise. It was obvious that she studied well who was behind the door and then without asking opened the door. These days it was not common to do this.

"Lyuba, forgive me, maybe I came at the wrong time, but I am joining the White Army and came to say good bye."

"They killed my father last night," she replied almost in a trance. "I cannot be with you here too long, I cannot leave Mama alone... she is not feeling well..."

"I will not come inside," I reassured her. "Why have they killed your father? Poor Lyuba, it must be very painful for you..."

"Good-bye, Orest, I cannot talk now..." she interrupted and closed the door.

I looked inquisitively at the house in which Lyuba disappeared. Our "Good bye" came out somewhat incongruous, unfinished, unconvincing. I felt inside an unpleasant aftertaste, I felt uncomfortable, awkward, like not my usual self.

Without turning to look back, I walked on the alley, trying hard to imagine what happened to Lyuba. Why the last encounter came out in such strange and unpleasant form. And I came to the conclusion that all this was connected with the tragic death of her father. She was not herself today.

"But who killed her father? Definitely, Bolsheviks. A revenge—one more innocent victim," was the answer in my mind. I decided that I would write her and in a letter explain all that had accumulated in my soul during these last days. And I walked the long way home.

Mother encountered with a question, "Well, Rostik, what you intend to do?"

"To fight, *Mamusya*."<sup>4</sup>

"It's scary, you could be killed."

"Yes, Mama, everything could happen. Even here in this apartment there is no guarantee that we could remain alive. You know that last night they killed engineer Tcherednichenko?"

"Who, Nikolay Ivanovich?"

"Yes, yes... That's Mama without a war."

"Why? What was the reason?"

"Don't you know? That's the way of Bolsheviks!"

"Rostik, you think they could come to us, too?"

"I don't know, Mama, everything could happen. That's why I am going to fight, to

make everything better in this land, to make Russia to be Russia again, and not a Bolshevik's preposterous state as it is becoming now. It is imperative to annihilate Bolsheviks, Mama. But to be killed—they can kill you here, too..."

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Blagorodniye serdza" [in Russian] .MS, from a Notebook (Germany, 1945-1946) trans. Olga Gladky Verro, 2001. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "Medieval Execution."

3. A name coined by the Bolsheviks to the members of the White Guards.

4. Endearing of Mama.

## White Army Volunteers

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In the middle of May, 1919 the Whites regained control and returned to Nikitovka.<sup>1</sup> This happened after the short occupation by the Reds who burned eleven White officers<sup>2</sup> and executed several well-known citizens. That summer, the rumors reported on the "railroad news" were confirmed by people coming from different places—the Whites return was only temporary—the Reds were again moving closer and closer with more massive forces. This time, according to numerous witnesses, the news was particularly troubling—the Reds conscript the youth into the Red Army when they occupy an area.

For many families this was the time to demonstrate their allegiance to Russia and their rejection of Soviet rule under which they didn't want their children to live. In my family, my father and mother didn't keep a secret from us children for whom they stood; there was no doubt in their answer, "For Russia, of course!"

That's why my parents and parents of my four school friends (all boys between the ages of sixteen and seventeen) felt pressured to make a quick decision. My parents and the parents of Vadim Kuzenko, Mikhail and Adrian Volkov, and Yasha Malobrodsky had known each other for many years. They felt the need to discuss the precarious situation, especially the rumors that the Reds were drafting youth in their army, and to find the best solution for their sons. All us boys were present at their gathering and actively took part in the discussion that concerned our future.

There was no doubt in our parents' minds that in the long run the Whites would prevail and restore order in our country. Our parents came to the unanimous decision, "Our sons would defend Russia from the ravages of revolution instead of waiting to be drafted in the Red Army and forced to fight for the Bolsheviks. After all," they reasoned, "the rumors from Crimea are encouraging since England and France began to supply the White Army with the arms and ammunition through the Bosphorus Straits access to the Black Sea." They all agreed that once the Whites had time to regroup, they would

push the Reds back North.

They asked us, boys, to be patient and wait until the Whites would retake Nikitovka, which was imminent as of the word of mouth on the railroad, and we would then join the White Army. Naturally, we boys were full of youthful enthusiasm and excited by the idea of enlisting as volunteers in the White Army.

This happened very soon when White Army cavalry division retreated south from Kharkov. Vadim Kuzenko's uncle, who was a captain in that division was temporarily stationed in one of the railroad cars at the station of Nikitovka. Our parents sent us boys to see Roman Ivanovich Kuzenko. He enrolled us as volunteers in the White Army and immediately assigned us to the military school in Sevastopol, a coastal town in the southwestern Crimea. So it was, that in the fall of 1919, my four friends and I, with our parents' blessings, departed as volunteers for military school in Sevastopol.

Embracing us before departure, our parents told us, "Defend Russia, and don't surrender to Bolsheviks!"

Although we left from station of Nikitovka on a train, we often had to walk from one station to the next because of interruptions in railroad service. Many times we had to join either military or the civilians, or sometimes both, who were running south, escaping the Reds who were pushing relentlessly from the north.

Finally we reached Sevastopol, where Vadim, Yasha, and I were sent to artillery school, and Mikhail and Adrian were sent to learn another military specialty. We stayed at the military school for about four months. Training was proceeding with much speed, even though young volunteers had to learn how to use not only Russian, but also English and French artillery guns, as well as their machine guns, handguns and other weapons supplied to the White Army by the English and French governments.

The brothers Mikhail and Adrian were sent to the front first. In April of 1920 Vadim and I were assigned to the Fifth Battery of Artillery Brigade under the command of General-Major Drozdovsky. At that time his troops were designated to defend Perekop, a narrow strip of land connecting the Crimean Peninsula to the mainland and the Ukraine. Perekop was a strategically important point for Crimean defense. Whites hoped to stall the Reds there long enough to gain time to reorganize and receive more weapons and ammunition promised them from England.

We joined the Fifth Battery Artillery Brigade in Sevastopol. We found there a long train of freight cars standing at the station. English artillery pieces were being loaded on platform cars and horses were snorting in closed cars. The artillerymen were sitting and standing in freight cars with open doors. On the station platform businesslike officers were solemnly discussing something. There on the platform was standing also the Commander of the Fifth Battery, Captain Mussyn-Pushkyn. Tall and erect, he was giving the last minute orders to the officers. The Fifth Battery Artillery Brigade was ready to depart for the front.

Vadim and I proudly presented ourselves to our Commander. Dressed in English uniforms, we stood at attention in front of the Captain and saluted him with serious expressions on our faces, our right hands touching the bills of our military caps.

"Sir Captain!" reported Vadim. "Volunteers Vadim Kuzenko and Orest Gladky are at your disposal!"

The Commander had already received the information that we were joining his unit. Immediately, without question, he told us, "Very well, gentlemen, you are going to

travel in car number eighteen. You'd better hurry; we are departing shortly."

We both answered in unison, "Yes! Sir Captain!"

After making a turnabout, we went in search of car eighteen. We found the car quickly and climbed in. Politely we said "Hello!" to the others who were already there. Someone answered us, but most of them paid no attention to two young boys. We found a spot where there was room for us to sit together and accommodated ourselves on our military bags. The train began to move, slowly increasing its speed.

The sun quickly disappeared over the horizon and the car swayed on in semi-darkness. The soldiers began to accommodate themselves for the night and propped their heads on military bags. Their quiet, calm conversations included no references to the forthcoming battle. Instead, they talked about how uncomfortable travel was in the freight cars, or about the homes and loved ones they had left behind. It seemed that they did not think about war; nobody talked about it—as if it didn't exist.

As Vadim and I talked, we tried very hard to make our voices sound more mature. We also imitated the way adult soldiers smoked and spat bitter nicotine saliva through their teeth. We silently observed the unknown men with whom we would fight against the Reds in the coming battle. Before long, the monotonous rumble of the train lulled us into a healthy, youthful sleep.

The morning greeted us with sun and warmth. A very small station accommodated our train on its reserve tracks. The Fifth Battery started to unload. The horses were led out of the freight cars. Field guns and various vehicles—field carts, machinegun carts, and simple peasant wagons—were rolled off platform cars. All battery implements were loaded onto these vehicles; machine guns were mounted on their carts, and draft horses were harnessed and attached to the carts. The horses waited impatiently to get on the road.

Before the unloading began, the battery Commander sent a message assigning the two of us as gun layers on the English cannons, called "three-inchers" to distinguish them from Russian cannons. I was assigned to the Fourth cannon, and Vadim was assigned to the First cannon. Both of us knew the English cannons well from our training at artillery school, where we had been since we arrived from home until we were assigned to the Fifth Battery. Yes, we had good training, but we had never been in a real battle and we awaited the event with an impatient, youthful excitement.

Finally, the formation was ready. The orders were given.

"Mount the horses!"

"Forward, ma-a-a-rch!"

The Fifth Battery began to move slowly westward out of the small rail station. At the head of the column was the Commander of the Battery on a black horse. Behind him were the cannons, and next, the machinegun carts, each with their officers and crew. The medical unit followed them, and the field kitchen with wagons carrying provisions and supplies was at the rear of the column.

The veteran artillerymen were curious about us newly arrived volunteers, the two young boys. I was skinny with brown hair and searching brown eyes. And Vadim was robust with broad shoulders, red hair, and red cheeks against a fair complexion, and the greenish gray eyes. The older artillerymen asked us if we had flown away from our parents' nests. They were surprised that both of us, "boys," as they almost paternally called us, not only had permission from our fathers and mothers, but were acting on

their precept to “Defend Russia, and don't surrender to Bolsheviks!”

When the Fifth Artillery Division reached the small Tartar village of Kurman-Kemelchy, the order to stop was received. The soldiers were told to find a place to stay overnight in the village and the officers in the nearby manor.

In the morning, the artillerymen began intensive training on the English cannons that were new to the veterans, who needed to learn how to use them. But for us two young volunteers just out of Artillery School who knew the cannons well, life away from the battlefield seemed pretty dull, and we waited impatiently to depart to the front line where the real action was. We grew very excited when training was over and the order came to move in the direction of northwest.

The last stop we made was in a town called Armyansky Bazar<sup>3</sup> for final inspection. There the Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Armed Forces, General Baron P. N. Vrangel, inspected the Fifth Artillery Division that was destined to get out to the spacious steppes of Southern Ukraine. There it would strike against the Reds in Tavrya where they were trying to break through Perekop to Crimea.

Our young faces lit up with joy and pride at seeing the Commander-in-Chief in person and hearing his patriotic address to the troops, inciting them to: “Fight the Red scum who are trying to destroy Mother Russia!” After that short but impassioned speech, each soldier felt like he was personally responsible for the outcome of the impending battle. Vadim and I were full of fervor to get to the front line and finally take part in a real fight against the Bolsheviks.

On our way to the front, I became ill. During the veteran training, when we slept in a village hut, one of my comrades, also a young volunteer from the town of Bachmut, was ill and shivering from fever. I covered him with my blanket. The next day he was taken to the hospital with spotted fever typhus. My blanket was infested with lice from which I caught the spotted fever typhus, too. I was unconscious the whole time I was being transferred from the field hospital to a busy military hospital in the town of Dzhankoy, a town in the northern Crimea near Perekop. There I remained unconscious a long time. Very rarely, I came to and understood what was going on around me. Later, I was transferred to another large military hospital in the town of Simferopol, a town in the interior of Crimea.

It was very late in the spring of 1920 when I finally got well, but not well enough to be sent to the front. I was so weak that I couldn't walk without getting dizzy. I was called before the military committee where I was asked if there was any place I could go to convalesce. I mentioned that I had an uncle at the station of Feodosia, a coastal town in the south of Crimea, and the committee granted me a two-week furlough so I could go there to regain my strength.

I arrived at my uncle Pyetr's house unexpectedly. I told him the news from Nikitovka and all about my unsuccessful attempt to fight the Reds. At his home, I recovered my strength. By the end of June, I was finally strong enough to go back to military headquarters and request a return to the Fifth Artillery Division. Since I still looked pale and weak, I was sent for an interview with the captain in charge of recruitment for Officers' School. The captain offered to send me to the Officers' School in Feodosia since I had enough education to be accepted there. But I firmly replied, “No! And no! Sir Captain, there are already too many officers and not enough soldiers! I want to return to the Fifth Artillery Division.”

Upon hearing my convincing refusal to attend Officers' School, the captain ordered, "Your Division is now right on the front line north of Perekop engaged in fighting the Red cavalry under the command of Zhloba. You may join them as soon as you find transportation there."

"Yes, Sir," I replied with the youthful enthusiasm.

I boarded the first train going north. It was bringing supplies, ammunition, and soldiers returning to their detachments at the front lines after recuperating in the military hospital in Feodosia. When the train arrived at the station of Dzhankoy, ammunition and provisions were unloaded from the railroad cars and then reloaded onto awaiting wagons for delivery to the front line. I found a wagon going to the Fifth Artillery Division and traveled in it to my destination. The driver knew Vadim and gave me the good news that my friend was alive and well.

I found Vadim greatly matured due to several months of hard living in open fields and fighting on the front line. His face was burned by sun and wind, and his uniform and boots were worn out. Vadim had learned from the veteran artillerymen to exaggerate when telling about the battles he had fought, and he boasted about his military experiences. It made me feel bad for having lost so much time fighting for my own life and winning only one long battle with an invisible enemy called "typhus." I felt even worse for having lost during my illness such glorious moments of fighting with the real enemy of Russia, the Bolsheviks. But now... Now, I was overwhelmed by a patriotic love for Russia and a burning determination to do what I had come here for in the first place, fight the "Red scum."

However, I had returned at a very critical time in the defense of Perekop. Small bands of Red cavalry occasionally penetrated White territory and enemy artillery was already reaching our positions. Now I had the chance to fire my canon, sometimes non stop all day long. The pressure from the Reds was increasing steadily, and the Fifth Artillery Division slowly retreating south. Now we fired our artillery guns at the Reds mostly in defense tactics, trying to prevent them from surrounding or overrunning us or the other White positions where our men were desperately fighting in this region.

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Dobrovoltsy" [in Russian] MS, TS, (Ventnor, I. of W., Great Britain, May 1954). ed. and trans. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro Additions as recounted by Orest M. Gladky.

2. See the chapters "Medieval Execution" and "The Noble Hearts."

3. Armenian Bazaar.

## After The Battle

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Like a huge, fiery, orange ball, the sun rolled down the western sky.<sup>1</sup> The Fifth Battery of the Artillery Brigade<sup>2</sup> left its position at the front line and formed a long,

narrow column that moved slowly toward a German colony<sup>3</sup> that appeared just beyond a small hill. The colony's splendid green gardens and red-tiled roofs greeted the tired artillerymen, promising deserved rest.

The hot day of almost non-stop artillery firing came to an end. A cool evening and peace and quiet were approaching. Friendly, refreshing currents of rapidly cooling air could be felt. Everyone needed to rest, quench their thirst, wash the sweat and dust off after a daylong battle, appease their hunger and finally fall asleep. No, perhaps they wanted most of all to drop into a deep sound sleep to make up for the sleepless hours endured during the disturbed, tense nights at the front. Just to lie down, it didn't even matter where, as long as they could sprawl out their limbs, close their eyes and lose consciousness until the morning. To be sure, they would wake up very early and again hear the command. "Ma-a-a-rch!" And then on the front line hear, "Scattered fire!" And again, "Fire!... Fire!... And, hopefully, to hear, "Forward!" But that was just the wishful dream of a young volunteer.

In reality, the Fifth Artillery Battery Division made no headway for a long time and marched up and down in northern Tavria among the same cleanly kept German colonies and mowed fields, among the melon fields with succulent watermelons and sweet-scented melons... The men's thoughts flew forward, and forward! And even though they felt strong in spirit, little could be done with fewer and fewer men remaining to fight...

The Fifth Battery of the Artillery Brigade moved to the unpaved road. The horses' feet flung up dust that wrapped the column in a thick gray cloud that trailed behind it along the road in a long smoky tail. The Fourth cannon inhaled most of the dust stirred up by the whole Battery ahead of it. The artillery crew was instantly covered in a velvety-gray coating; only the artillery Commander, Lieutenant Toglyev-Kushchiyev riding his horse in the field against the wind, remained untouched by the dusty cloud.

Once more the sun smiled on the column then disappeared over the edge of the horizon. The Fifth Battery of the Artillery Brigade entered the German colony and stopped before it reached the outlying cottages. It was a small colony consisting of one large street, like most German colonies in that region, with fifteen to twenty homesteads located on each side of it.

The drivers immediately took care of the horses, without removing the gun gears. After a busy day, the rest of the crew's first duty was to clean the guns. Together with two other crewmembers, we laid a tarpaulin canvas on the ground and began cleaning the gunlock, while the rest of the crew cleaned the gun's barrels.

The Reds were only a few kilometers away in a neighboring colony. On the wind the fragments of their songs could occasionally be heard:

"With courage we will go into battle for the power of the Soviets.

And all of us will die for its cause..."

To the White soldiers it seemed that along with that song they could almost hear the hollow steps of the Red infantry which was by that time already well organized, trained and harshly disciplined. Although the crew was already used to the closeness of the Reds, they also knew that they had to be on the alert at all times, and so they hurried to clean their guns.

Dusk was quickly approaching and the southern night began embracing the surroundings. The crew was eager to rest, to sleep and relax their tired bodies.

Suddenly, at the opposite end of the colony, where Drosdov's Seventh Howitzer Battery Brigade was positioned, was heard an explosion and the bright flash illuminated the sky. Everyone in the Fifth Battery of the Artillery Brigade was alarmed. A patrol was dispatched to find out what happened to our fellow soldiers in Drosdov's Seventh Howitzer Battery. The patrol returned with the news that an artilleryman on one of the crews had forgotten to unload a Howitzer at the firing line and accidentally fired it right at the edge of the colony.

The soldiers from the patrol brought back several empty metal boxes from the Howitzer shells as souvenirs of the accident. One of the boxes ended up in my hands, and it traveled with me long after the civil war was over. I kept my tobacco and smoking paraphernalia in it. Every time I took this box in my hands, I remembered the incident at the Seventh Howitzer Battery.

The field kitchen did not arrive in time, but the artillerymen were so tired that they didn't even feel hungry. After cleaning the guns, they sprawled out near them on the dusty road and enjoyed the coolness of the night. However, the incident in the Seventh Howitzer Battery had disrupted their intentions of quickly falling asleep. Instead of the sound sleep, they engaged in quiet conversation. I remember that somebody spoke of something peaceful, about his happy past and life at home. Everyone listened to the young man's simple story, a story common to most of these beardless boys still in their teens, who had so recently exchanged gymnasiums uniforms for English field jackets. They had lived similar lives and had similar interests in the past, and fought in the present hoping to have a similar future. The only things that distinguished them were their names, the color of their eyes and hair, and the shapes of their bodies.

Complete darkness surrounded the young artillerymen. The young storyteller, who sat beside me, stopped in the middle of a sentence without finishing the most interesting part of his story, and his head lolled down onto my leg. Pure silence followed, no one said another word. I realized that a healthy, youthful sleep had overtaken my companions and that I was the only one who had remained awake, waiting to hear the end of the story. For a while I stared into the darkness without moving, because I didn't want to disturb the young storyteller's quiet sleep. I finally noticed that I hadn't washed my hands or brushed the dust out of my clothes, and I hadn't had the chance to quench my thirst.

I rested upon the wheel of my cannon, staring into darkness and let my thoughts wander. Good God! What thoughts may float in the head of a not-yet-eighteen-year-old volunteer of the White Army! My thoughts ran ahead in time. I imagined myself to be already a Captain, or maybe a Colonel, or—why not?—even a Major-General... I was in charge of an artillery division, or maybe a brigade, or—why not?—the whole front was under my command... My army took villages and towns one after the other and I marched triumphantly with my troops through my small hamlet... Or—why not?—my army assaulted the cities of Moscow and Petrograd... And I envisioned the entire Motherland being liberated from the hordes of Reds... My Motherland, to whom I gave the best years of my life...

The twinkling dots of stars sprinkled on the dark sky were like precious stones tossed on a sea of black velvet. My eyes became accustomed to the darkness and I could recognize the contours of gardens and rooftops. And closer to me I could discern the motionless bodies of my battle friends sprawled out on the dusty road. In the

silence of the night I could hear their breathing or their snoring and the occasional snorting of the horses. Overhead, a bat silently darted over like a fleeting shadow under the cover of night... The earth rested in darkness; only the crickets in the fields engaged in sibilant chorus and the light wind caused a barely perceptible rustle of leaves in the colony gardens.

Before a daybreak, a single gunshot was heard. I woke up and saw the horseman who had come to check on the horses. He patted them gently, soothed them with a few kind words, and remained standing next to them. Somebody sobbed in his sleep. Trying not to disturb my companions, I carefully got up, took my tobacco box from my field bag and walked over to the horseman. In silence we rolled cigarettes, and hiding the light of our matches in the hollow of our hands began to smoke. It was dawning...

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Poslye doya" [in Russian] MS, TS (Ventnor, I. of W., Great Britain, 1955). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro, trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993.
  2. See the chapter "White Army Volunteers."
  3. Small villages.

## Nata

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

I recall the tragic events that occurred soon after my eighteenth birthday.<sup>1</sup> It was the eighteenth or nineteenth of October, by the old calendar, of the catastrophic year 1920, when the fight of the Whites to save Holy Russia was coming close to a dismal outcome. Thousands of exhausted Russian men wearing Russian and English uniforms swarmed over the wide, autumn-gloomy steppes of the southern Ukraine, right at the doors of Crimea. They were powerless to stem the tide of raging, advancing Red cavalry that outnumbered them many times over. The cavalry of Bolshevik General Budenny and the Red infantry of Siberians drafted by Bolsheviks and sent there to "liberate" Crimea from the last stronghold of the Whites were too great an enemy.

Disarranged and disconnected White military units tried to avoid, or desperately fought to break free of the Red's encirclement. All units anxiously sought to find a way to Perekop and the Sivashy,<sup>2</sup> or to the Chongarsky Railroad Bridge. They hoped these obstacles would serve as natural fortifications that would help them to hold back the advancing wild Red hordes.

In one of the Red artillery<sup>3</sup> shellings, a few days before my birthday, I suffered a contusion in my left leg, my left eardrum was ruptured from the air pressure of the explosion, and I lost my hearing. I was transferred to a transport unit that was rapidly retreating south toward the sea.

The horses were rushing at full speed on the dusty autumn road toward the Sivashy. To the right were the railroad tracks; to the left, the immense flatness of harvested fields. In the watchful tension, one could hear the muffled thud of horses'

hooves on the soft, dusty road, and occasional peremptory shouting of the drivers. Officers and soldiers intently scrutinized the far away murkiness. Their thoughts were focused on finding a way to escape, from being surrounded by the Reds.

Unexpectedly, far off to the right on the other side of the railroad tracks, appeared the barely defined figures of Red cavalry riders. The transport drivers urged the horses into a gallop.

From the station of Salkovo, situated not far from the town of Militopol,<sup>4</sup> appeared the strings of carts and carriages of every kind, and their horses galloped at full speed through the field, racing each other. The drivers urged the horses on with wild screams, and to increase their speed they threw part of their loads to the ground littering it with all kinds of things. When they reached our transport unit they rode alongside our wagons, inserted themselves between them; then they finally passed and left us behind. On foot, soldiers, civilians, and nurses in blue uniforms ran between and behind the carts, wagons, and carriages, some of them trying to hold on to the wagons to speed up their pace.

Several of our transport wagons, including the one I was riding on, were run off the road, and our horses continued racing through the field. Suddenly we got onto a steep embankment. For a moment it seemed that we were safe. Then, to our right side, appeared a chain of soldiers who seemed to be waiting for the enemy. The officers wore White Army uniforms, but most of the soldiers wore Red Army uniforms. An idea flashed in my mind, "It must be General Drozdovsky's Third Infantry Regiment, the one he hurriedly organized almost entirely of captive Red soldiers". But after our transport wagons passed them the soldiers stuck their bayonets in the ground and raised their hands. In no time a unit of General Budenny's Red Cavalry surrounded them and they surrendered without a fight.

Our group of transport wagons, including mine, came up the embankment. To our left was a place called Gnyloye Boloto<sup>5</sup>, where we could see that the detachments of Red Cavalry had already arrived and were fanning out to encircle us.

Suddenly a scream resounded, "We are surrounded!" All hope of escape disappeared in seconds. Drivers and soldiers jumped down from the wagons and began to run in every direction, trying to lose themselves in the chaos of running people and frightened horses pulling unattended wagons.

The irregular and sporadic gunfire, the cries of wounded men, and the savage shouts of the Red horsemen impelled me to run for cover toward one wagon that stood still. Almost unconsciously, it dawned on me that the shoulder straps on my English field jacket were too bright. I searched the wagon for something to cover them with and found a Russian soldier's overcoat that I hurriedly donned, while quickly scanning the chaotic field.

The Red horsemen were galloping everywhere and there was no way out. A *budennovyets*<sup>6</sup> on a skewbald horse was galloping straight toward me. He swung his sword high above his head, its blade shining red reflecting rays of the disappearing sun. Instinctively, I jumped under the wagon, hoping that the horses would stay put.

The *budyennovyets* closed in on my wagon. His slashing sword pierced the side of the wagon and a piece of torn board fell to the ground. As I crouched under the wagon I thought, "I am still alive! Perhaps the Red has spent his Bolshevik fury on the wagon. Perhaps he will let me live..."

The *budyennyets* cursed obscenely, then rudely shouted the order, "Come out you White scum!" Slowly, I came out from hiding.

"Wha-a-t are you, an *akhvitser*<sup>7</sup>?" asked the *budyennyets* mispronouncing the words.

"Wha-a-t?" I asked him, mocking his pronunciation.

"*Akhvitser*?" repeated the *budyennyets* impatiently.

"Who-o?.. Me-e-e?..." I asked him slowly, as if I were surprised to hear such a question.

The *budyennyets* cursed again, hooked his sword blade under the shoulder straps on the soldier's coat I wore, and cut them off. "Climb up on the wagon! Turn it around, and drive that way!" he ordered, pointing his sword to the north. I climbed on the wagon and slowly began to redirect the horses. The *budyennyets* galloped off in search of another victim.

From the wagon I saw a long freight train on the railroad tracks. One of the middle cars had a black Orthodox cross on it. "The church wagon", I thought. "It must be one of our trains; the Reds don't have crosses on their cars". A small locomotive engine with steam rising from its stack was at the south end of the train. Suddenly the shunting engine with only one car attached to it, separated itself from the rest of the train and moved south, quickly increasing its speed. From the open door of the attached freight car the rattle of a machine gun resounded. The *budyennyets*<sup>8</sup>, alarmed by the sudden machine gun fire, left the wagons with the horses and prisoners, and rushed in the direction of the runaway train.

In the confusion that followed, I took the opportunity to stop the horses, turn my wagon south, and ride as fast as the horses could carry me down the hill toward the sea. Abruptly the horses came to a stop at the edge of a steep precipice. I flew out of the wagon over the horses' bodies and rolled down the sheer sandy slope all the way to the shore of the Sivashy. When I finally stopped rolling, my feet were buried in soft, dry sand. Down here, everything was calm, quiet, and most reassuring because no wild figures dressed in *budyennyets* uniforms were in sight.

With difficulty I got up, and, though limping because of my injured leg, started to run as fast as I could along the shore. It was hard for me to run on the uneven ground; sometimes my feet sank in the soft sand, and then, a few yards farther on, I got stuck in the muddy bottom of a swamp where I had to get into the water almost to my knees to get around the remnants of barbed wire barrier.

When I passed the trail leading to the station I saw people running down the slope toward the shore. I continued to run along the shoreline until I saw homes in the distance and turned onto a steep trail leading to them.

On the trail I heard running footsteps behind me, then a feeble female voice full of despair called, "Help me, in the name of God..." I looked back and saw a young woman. I ran back to her. In the vanishing evening light I cast a few glances at my unexpected companion. Her face was flushed from emotion and fatigue. Her big blue eyes were filled with fear over what had just happened to her. She looked at me in mute appeal for help. She was slim and wore a tight-fitting black coat with a small fur collar. Without a word, I grabbed her hand and together we continued to run in silence, not knowing where to, but with redoubled hopes of saving our lives.

As we climbed, the narrow trail became more solid and less steep, enabling us to

run faster. After awhile we saw rooftops, then small huts scattered here and there, and slowly an entire small fishermen's village was spread out before our eyes. There were probably only a dozen-and-half huts. As we came closer we recognized a few *budyennyets* on their horses, moving here and there between the huts at the opposite end of the village.

We ran to the hut closest to the trail. The door opened, as if we had been expected, and an elderly fisherman invited us into his hut without any questions. The fisherman's wife showed us to a bench and brought us a big mug of water. "Take a short rest," suggested the fisherman, "and I will go out and see what's going on." And he left us with his wife. Thirstily, we gulped all the water. I got up and went to look out the small window. The fisherman's wife followed her husband, leaving us alone.

Suddenly the young woman began to shiver. Her face grew pale; she closed her eyes and put her fingers against her temples. I went to her and bending over her asked gently, "What happened?"

She slowly opened her eyes and smiled faintly, "Don't you worry. It has already passed." The warmth of her voice made its way to my young heart. "You are my brother, and I am Nata," whispered the young woman.

"And I am Rostik," I answered, not yet understanding why she had decided that we should be brother and sister. Somebody came to the door and Nata put a silencing finger to her mouth. I pulled my tobacco box out of my pocket, put it on the table, and began to roll a cigarette.

The door squeaked and the fisherman came back inside. "Everything in the neighborhood is calm," he said. "The Reds are at the other end of the village. You should run to that hut, now!" And through a small window he showed me the last house to the south that was located farthest from the trail. "It will be safer for you there." He explained, "Their son is somewhere on the front with the Whites. The old man will gladly give you refuge. My house is first off the trail—everybody comes here first. The Reds will come to look here pretty soon. You'd better hurry, while it is still quiet over there." My young companion and I thanked the kind fisherman and his wife for their help and stepped outside.

We hurriedly made our way to our new refuge. An elderly man was standing near the door of his hut. The nets hanging on the south side of the dwelling indicated that its owner still labored at his trade despite his advanced age that was asking already to take a rest. He greeted us as though he already knew why we came. He swiftly led us into the hut and then into a second room where no unexpected visitor could see us.

The fisherman's wife brought us two chairs and put them away from the windows near a brick nook in chimney's wall called a stove couch. She asked us to sit there while her husband kept watch on the movement of the Reds in the neighborhood.

We sat silently and listened attentively for a while to what was going on outside the walls of the poor hut. I took off the soldier's overcoat and my cap. Then I felt the urge to smoke but remembered that I had left my tobacco box on the table at the first hut. I told Nata that I would run to get it and quickly exited.

I almost reached the first fisherman's dwelling when I saw a *budyennyets* astride a horse behind a fence near an outhouse. The Red saw me, too, and probably noticed the bright shoulder straps on my English uniform that identified me as a White. I couldn't run, I was far from both huts, and there was no place to hide nearby.

*Budyennyets* urged his horse to jump over the fence that divided us. But the horse only pranced and was not willing to obey despite being spurred by her master.

A stream of curses poured from the Red's lips, he pulled out his revolver and began frantically shooting at me. "One,.. two,.. three .. four ... five..." I counted the shots, unable to move; I just stood there frozen. The horse continued to prance and the Red couldn't take aim at me. The bullets went deep into the ground, or flew to the right or left of me, or over my head.

Suddenly I heard a whistling sound of an approaching artillery shell and instinctively threw myself down to the ground among some dry weeds and covered my head with both hands. The close, loud explosion followed. When the cloud of flying soil settled, I raised my head and saw that the *budyennyets* was lying on the ground on my side of the fence with his arms spread out. His horse was free, running from the scene of the explosion.

I ran quickly to the first fisherman's hut. As he opened the door for me, the terrified fisherman crossed himself and said, "God, my dear God, I thought he would kill you!"

"No, it was not my time to die, yet," I answered, trying to conceal that I was scared. Then I added proudly, "But the *budyennyets* was probably killed by the White artillery shell fired from Crimea..."

"That's what it was, that explosion?" asked the fisherman.

"I believe so," I replied. "I had to return to pick up my tobacco box; I left it on your table."

"You should be more careful," the fisherman warned. "The Reds are everywhere, and you should have at least removed the field-jacket. Those bright shoulder straps could be seen from a mile away, and the Red devils will shoot at them at once. You could have asked Vasily to get your tobacco box. They don't shoot at us fishermen so quickly as those of you in uniform."

I tried to excuse myself, "You are right, *khosyain*,<sup>9</sup> but I needed to smoke so badly that I couldn't wait!"

"This is from being agitated," explained the fisherman.

"Do you want to try my tobacco?" I offered.

"No, no, thank you very much," the fisherman readily refused. "I smoke only *makhorka*.<sup>10</sup> Tobacco is not strong enough for me; it doesn't satisfy my craving for a smoke."

As we were talking, we heard more explosions. But now the shells were falling farther to the north of the fishermen's village, where most of the Reds were concentrated. I was right, the Whites were shelling from Crimea. An idea flashed in my mind, "Maybe it would be worthwhile to take advantage of the Reds' confusion and try to reach the Chongarsky Bridge tonight."

When I returned to the second hut, *khosyaika*<sup>11</sup> admonished me, "Your wife is worrying about you! Hurry and calm her down."

"My wife?" I thought, "What is this? Maybe Nata changed her idea about our being brother and sister and told them that we are husband and wife". I rushed into the other room. The anxious look in Nata's wide-opened eyes and something more than just worry greeted me. A slight smile of joy illuminated her beautiful, delicate face.

"The shell fell somewhere very close here. I wanted to run..." she said in a

trembling voice.

"Run where? And why?" I questioned her, looking deep into her worried eyes, and a glimmer of hope, of something new not known before, filled my young heart.

"I wanted to make sure, if nothing bad had happened to you," Nata said softly and somewhat embarrassed. "Yes, a White shell fell quite close to me, near the hut where we first stopped." I said it almost casually and reassured her, "But, you see, I am alive and the *budyennovyets* who was trying to shoot me is dead."

"Oh, my God! I felt that you were in danger..."

"I hurried back," I added, "to tell you about my idea. As you can hear, the White artillery from Crimea has begun shelling the Reds. They will probably pound them for a while. The Reds will be in disarray for some time. Now is a good time for us to try to sneak through without taking a big risk. I think we should make a run now for Chongarsky Bridge." It seemed that I was reasoning not only with Nata, but was also trying to reassure myself that my plan was correct and it was worth to take a chance.

"No, Rostik, we better wait. I am too tired and don't want to leave this safe place now," Nata pleaded.

The old fisherman overheard our discussion from the other room and stepped in. "It is too dangerous to try to reach the Chongarsky Bridge now," he said. "The Red horsemen are scouring the village. They are trying to be secure for the night."

"But staying here is even more dangerous," I replied.

"No, Rostik, we should wait!" Nata supplicated. "*Khosyaika* told me that we might stay here overnight."

I suddenly made a chivalrous decision not to leave a defenseless woman to the mercy of faith, "Well, all right, I am remaining here only for your sake."

Once the argument was settled, the old fisherman suggested to Nata and me to change our clothes. His wife opened a big trunk full of old peasant's clothing. I removed my English field jacket with the bright shoulder straps, pulled out the bottoms of the trousers tucked in the boots to cover them. *Khosyaika* found an old somewhat tightly fitting jacket and *kosovorotka*<sup>12</sup> for me. "It's my son's clothing," she explained.

For Nata she found a peasant's blouse and a gathered skirt. Then she covered Nata's head with a white kerchief and skillfully tied it in a peasant style. After we changed our clothes, *khosyaika* quickly hid my field jacket, soldier's overcoat, and peak-cap, and Nata's clothing and black coat in the bottom of the trunk carefully covering it with the peasants' clothes. Then she left Nata and me alone in the second room, leaving the door half-open to allow a streak of faint light from a flickering oil lamp placed in the middle of the table.

For a while Nata and I listened to the sounds of the exploding shells that were falling farther and farther north from the village and finally stopped. In the twilight I was silently observing Nata—a newcomer in my life—trying to read her thoughts and feelings on her face. She was breathing deeply the fresh air of Sivashy coming from the open *fortochka*<sup>13</sup> and looking at me with unspoken curiosity, as if she wanted to find out more about me.

Trying to interrupt the silence, I asked, "How did you get caught in this unfortunate situation?"

"Not so loud, Rostik," she warned. "They could hear us..." Then she added with a slight embarrassment, "You should get used to talking to me, as if we are...you know,

husband and wife. Otherwise you might make mistakes in some dangerous situation."

"Well, I think that the danger is over...I mean, for you!"

"Let's hope you are right!" said Nata, and then tried to answer my question. "You were asking how I got here. Well, I was traveling from home to Crimea."

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"I am originally from Bachmut."

"I was asking where you are traveling from now." I clarified my question.

"A-a-a..." said Nata, like she finally understood my question. "Now I am traveling from Novo-Alexeyevka. My home is far from here. And here is all very temporary. You see what is happening to us? It is better not to ask too many questions; if we get caught it would be safer."

I thought that maybe the reason she did not want to run across the bridge when I suggested it earlier was that she had decided to return to Bachmut to her parents' home. "Do you want to wait here until the encircling is over and then return back home?" I asked. "I am from Nikitovka, and I can accompany you all the way to Bachmut." I really didn't plan to return home at that moment, but I suggested this only to find out where she really wanted to go.

"No, no, until the Bolsheviks are not there I shall never return to that town!" she answered, emphasizing the word "never."

"Why then after the Whites started the shelling didn't you want to go with me across the bridge to Crimea?" I asked.

Nata kept silent for a while like she was carefully thinking what she should answer, then touched my hand and said, "You have heard what the fisherman told us, that it was too dangerous."

"But tomorrow it could be even more dangerous," I replied. "Then maybe we can try it tonight?" she asked insecurely.

"No!" I said firmly. "At night I cannot risk it with you!"

"And alone?" questioned Nata.

"Alone I was ready to run an hour ago."

"Crazy! You young men, all of you are mad, ready to fly toward the danger! Many of you are perishing for this reason!"

Nata exclaimed in a manner that seemed unusual for her, as if she had been holding those words to herself for a long time and finally was able to say them aloud.

I got excited too. "Not simply going toward the danger, but defying danger to save the Holy Russia!"

"Russia is not demanding anybody to sacrifice himself needlessly!" And Nata abruptly concluded our discussion. "We have talked enough for today." She got up and went to the door.

During our long conversation we heard that *khosyaika* was preparing the supper. The clatter of the crockery and the smell of boiled fish were tempting our hungry stomachs, and we realized that we had nothing to eat the whole day.

Through the door Nata saw a young woman with a baby entering the hut. "Good evening to you," the young woman greeted the fisherman and his wife. "I was waiting for the shelling to stop, I didn't want to scare the baby. It is all quiet now, but the Red horsemen are still going from hut to hut searching for the Whites."

"You are just in time for supper," replied *khosyaika*.

The fisherman came to the door and pointing at Nata said to the young woman, "We have guests for tonight, young husband and wife." Then he invited Nata and me to share the meal with them. *Khosyaika* placed a pot with the hot fish soup, called *ukha*, and a big wooden ladle in the middle of the plain rustic table. Beside the pot she put a round loaf of dark peasant's bread, a big knife, and a container with sea salt. The deep earthen tureens and the wooden spoons were already piled up on one side of the table. The fisherman took one tureen and served himself by scooping the big ladle of *ukha*, then passed the ladle to me and I followed his example. Nata was next to serve herself; the fisherman's wife and daughter-in-law were the last.

Next he cut a large slice of bread from the loaf and passed the bread and the big knife to me and I, to Nata. When the meal was in front of each of us, the fisherman bowed his head and all followed his example. We listened to his prayer and crossed ourselves after saying "Amen!" Then we ate in silence. No one was asking any questions about each other. Who, why, where we were from? It was clear that these things were better left unsaid. However, after the meal was over, the fisherman warned me, "There might be some visits by the Red horsemen and it will be better to get ready for them."

The fisherman told me to sit on one of the three benches standing against the wall, the one farthest from the entrance door. He gave me a pair of worn-out shoes and a wooden toolbox and said, "You will be Nikolka. When some unexpected 'guests' arrive, start to remove the soles from the shoes." Then he turned to Nata and said: "And you will be..."

"Nata," she suggested promptly.

"Well, Nata, you will be the young mother." Nata nodded her head in agreement. "Mar'ya," he called his wife, who was busy clearing the table, "adjust her kerchief and have her sit on a bed." Then he asked his daughter-in-law to give her baby to Nata to hold, while she herself could find something to mend. For himself the fisherman brought in some nets to repair and put them in front of the center bench next to the one where I was sitting; the other near the door was left empty for the 'guests'. They did all this so quickly and efficiently, it seemed to me that they had done this many times before. It was a perfect picture of the poor fisherman's family doing their evening chores.

We didn't have to wait long. Soon the clatter of the horse's hoofs was heard nearing the hut. Without knocking, one very young *budyonnyets* entered the door. "Hi, fishermen!" he greeted in a friendly manner and asked, "Do you by any chance have some Whites in here?"

"How could they be here?" answered the old fisherman calmly. "As you can see, there is hardly room for us in this small hut!"

*Budennoyets* settled himself on the free bench near the door and pulled out a couple of apples from a pocket of his military coat. He proudly told us that his cavalry unit had taken those apples away from one rich Tartar farmer, who was bringing several baskets to the market in Militopol. When after this explanation he offered the apples to us, we all politely refused the offer. *Budennoyets* was a very talkative fellow and he was so pleased with himself boasting about military deeds and victories of his unit that he couldn't see that nobody was listening. All in the room were immersed in their own

thoughts and fears and were waiting impatiently for him to leave the hut.

Occasionally *budennyets* focused his eyes on Nata. Being observed by him, she felt nervous and the fear of this close encounter with the Red soldier colored scarlet her cheeks. She kept her eyelids semi-closed and her head bent down watching the baby in her lap. With one hand she was supporting the baby's head and with the other holding a pacifier that the sleeping baby was no longer sucking.

I watched Nata too, and our eyes occasionally met. Only I could understand the troubled look in her eyes and the emotional turmoil she felt at that time. To the casual observer she was an image of a young happy mother full of tender love for her baby. For a while my romantic imagination sidetracked me from the reality of the danger that Nata and I were in. I saw only an idyllic picture—a young Russian woman in all her glorious and exciting beauty, her exceptional charm and humility, goodness of heart, and sadness in her soul.... This image was worthy to be put on canvas by the brush of the most talented painter...

At that moment I wished that there was no war and that life would continue on the old proven path. That I was here in this poor fisherman's hut and there, on the big rustic bed, was my wife Nata holding our infant.... In this poetic fancy I pictured my love and happiness with Nata.

This vision was interrupted by the voice of the fisherman, "Hey, Nikolka, stop daydreaming! Put those old shoes aside, I need these nets to be repaired for the next time we go fishing. Check them out, would you!" He moved a part of the nets that he was repairing on my knees to cover my military boots that were to obviously sticking out.

The old man brought my thoughts to reality. Next to him, dressed in the Red Army uniform with the red star on his hat, was sitting *budennyets*, one of those who were bringing the ill fate on Holy Russia, who are murdering the Motherland and making her bleed without mercy. I suddenly felt the urge to jump up and crush the Red soldier, but one look at Nata was enough to sober my burning desire to annihilate the enemy. At that moment, unaware of the tension in the room, *budennyets* got up and saluted us, "Well, good night to all of you!" And he walked out.

The fisherman suggested that we all remain in our places for a while longer. "There could be more of *them* coming in. They would be less suspicious if we were all here in the open. I will go outside to check what is going on." I got up too, but the fisherman told me to stay inside and explained, "It is safer for you here; there are not too many young men remaining in the village. Some, like my son, joined the Whites, and the others are hiding from being drafted by the Reds."

In our attention to all suspicious sounds from the outside Nata and I exchanged a few short phrases. *Khosaika* and her daughter-in-law were talking to each other in subdued voices. The tension of waiting slowed the time. The fisherman returned and said only, "They are coming..." and returned repairing nets.

Momentarily, two young *budennyets* entered the hut and greeted us, "Hul-lo! Humble fishermen!" The old fisherman answered for all of us. Then one of them said, "We are *budennyets*, we are chasing the Whites and shall soon liberate the Crimea!" All in the room listened in silence.

*Budennyets* sat on the bench, removed their guns and began playfully to show off that they knew how to use them, and completed their show by cleaning and

polishing them. They smiled jokingly at the two young women and bragged about how they bravely “pushed the Whites into the sea.” The fisherman just nodded his head, the others listened without comment.

The fisherman noticed that I was aimlessly moving the nets and didn’t know what to do with them. He got up and told me that this could be done tomorrow in the daylight, and gave me back the old shoe, asking me to see if it could be repaired. I put the nets down on the clay floor, leaving some to cover my boots, and began to inspect carefully from all sides the old worn out shoe, as if estimating the possibilities of giving it a second life.

When the guns were finally polished, the young *budyennovtsy* asked *khosyaika* to give them some water to drink. They looked at the large family and consulted with each other about something, nodding their heads in agreement. Then one of them told the old fisherman that, since there were too many people in this hut, they would look for some other place to stay overnight.

After the *budyennovtsy* were gone, the old fisherman told his wife to accommodate Nata and me in the next room. She came with the oil lamp and placed it on a bench. Then she took two old blankets and the pillows filled with straw from the shelf and placed them on the stove-couch that was built into the hollow wall and was heated by the stove from the other room. “Climb up on the stove-couch,” she told us, “it will be nice and warm there, and quiet. And don’t worry—nobody can harm you here tonight. We will blow out the oil lamp soon. It is better not to have light at this hour of the night.” Then she added with a deep sigh, “I just hope that some merciful soul would give shelter to my son in his time of need.” She allowed us the time to climb on the stove-couch and wished us good night.

As she was leaving the room taking the oil lamp with her, the shadows were jumping on the walls from the moving flame. Nata pointed on one of the walls, “Look, Rostik, at that shadow, how grotesque and distorted it is, it resembles our lives...” The flame flickered and the shadow dashed around the room, jumped toward us, and finally dissolved in the darkness.

“No, Nata,” I disagreed with her, “life is not like that shadow. Yes, there are many ugly things in life, but there is much more beauty around us. It just happens that not every person can always see it and often cannot discover the beauty in themselves.”

“Do you really believe this to be true?” she asked me with doubt in her voice.

“Tell me,” I asked, “do you see the beauty in yourself?”

“In myself? A beauty? Rostik, I am very ordinary, very common,” answered Nata.

“But I can see your beauty!” I answered with ardor.

“It is too dark in here to see anything,” she quick-wittedly replied.

After this not so subtle declaration from me, for some time we lay next to each other in silence and listened to the sounds of the night, ready at the first sign of danger to jump up and run, but...we were not sure to where. In a sign of reassurance, I took in my hand the smooth, soft hand of my unexpected “wife” and held it and stroked it. From time to time I kissed her fingers and sensed the faint scent of her skin. The spark in my heart was starting to transform into a flame. I wanted to know who had performed this imaginary matrimony. Was it Nata, who told the *khosyaika* that we were married, or was it the fisherman or his wife who invented it to make the disguise more real? Was it just pure chance or predestination? I wanted to find out what Nata felt in her heart.

It was so hot on the stove couch that Nata broke the silence and asked me to move to the clay floor. Quietly we put our pillows and blankets down on the cool clay. The moon was shining down through the small window and I saw the face of Nata illuminated with a soft and mysterious light. It magically transformed my perception. Her youth and freshness infatuated me and her beauty cast a spell upon my whole being. I started to kiss her tenderly and to caress her with adoration, like she was a precious and delicate statuette made of finest china. And I felt that she reciprocated with sincere feminine joy. For a few moments we forgot who we were and why we were there in that poor fisherman's hut. The terrible day endured by us was melting away in the flame of youthful love...

Suddenly, Nata heartbrokenly whispered, "Rostik, my dear, I am married." As I heard those words, I got up at once. It was past midnight. The moon was shining through the window like before, but its magic had disappeared. I felt defeated. A beautiful dream of happiness that had overwhelmed me for only a few hours was crushed in a thousand pieces and the sharp fragments were piercing my heart and painfully penetrating in my soul. I felt chilly, tired, and surrounded by emptiness.

But I wanted to convey my gratitude to Nata for those few miraculous moments of happiness that she bestowed on me. On my knees I bent over her and saw the tears in her eyes. I kissed her tenderly on the cheek and said, "Forgive me, Nata, I didn't know, I didn't even guess."

"And I, Rostik, couldn't tell you before," she answered gently. "But our passion would have brought us too far. It would not have been right, I love my husband."

I reassured her, "Nata, don't you worry, I understand. You are trying to join him. I will be very happy if I could help you get out of here. I will not leave you until we reach Crimea."

Somebody cautiously knocked at the entrance door to the hut. I got up and opened slightly the door to the other room. I saw the fisherman opening the door and a tall stately man in White military uniform quietly entered the room. In a low voice he asked if the fisherman could help him change his uniform into civilian clothing. I understood that it was safe and opened the door. The men trembled.

"Don't worry, I have already changed my clothes, but didn't dare run across the bridge yet with my wife," I explained to him and presented myself.

The man replied, "I am General Popov, the Chief of the Red Cross." And he added with urgency in his voice, "Please, help me, I want to run across the Chongarsky Bridge tonight. I want to reach Crimea before dawn."

The fisherman started to pull out the old clothing of the big trunk to find a jacket that would fit the general. The night was very cold and I offered the general the soldier's overcoat with cut off shoulder straps.

"I guess that it is better to be caught dressed as a soldier, than as a general," he commented jokingly. "In any case, I could always throw it into Sivashy." He took off a golden ring from his finger and handed it to the old fisherman.

"God forbid!" exclaimed the fisherman. "I will not take it!"

You better hurry! We will pray to God that He protects you."

But the general put the ring on the table saying, "Well, then save it for me. If I get safely to Crimea, I will not need it. If the Reds capture me, they will take it from me; anyway, it is safer if I leave it with you."

The fisherman and I wished the general good luck and he walked swiftly toward Sivashy.

Early in the morning Nata and I dressed in peasants' clothing and went outside. All around was quiet. It seemed that everything was lying still in a deep sleep. We walked to the slope toward the Sivashy to explore what was going on. There was no sign either of *budyennovtsy* or of Whites.

Standing at the edge of a sandy slope I was looking at Nata dressed as a peasant woman with white kerchief on her head. The bright rays of morning sun were caressing her pale and tired face, which seemed even more beautiful to me than in the moonlight last night.

"Maybe, now?" asked Nata.

"Not yet, we have to be sure. I have no right to put your life in jeopardy."

"But when? There is nobody around now," she prompted me.

"I think that we will find out very soon. If the Whites last night brought the artillery into a position to reach beyond the village, they must have prepared the defenses by now," I said with an air of complete confidence.

Here from the high ground, I could observe the narrow, sandy serpentine road leading to Crimea. "Nata," I said, "look at the road. Do you see the ditches on both sides of it? Those are gutters for the rainwater." Then I explained, "Well, we have to follow the road for quite a while until we reach the Chongarsky Bridge. If there is an exchange of fire or if somebody shoots at us, don't run on the road, get down in the ditch and if necessary lie down and crawl or creep. Stay close me and listen to what I may tell you." I warned Nata what could happen during the escape, while I considered all possible alternatives from the advantageous height.

We returned to the fisherman's hut. With the tension of waiting, time passed painfully, slowly. After midday the White artillery began firing again, the shells falling far beyond the village. The fisherman meanwhile collected information from the others in the village that all *budyennovtsy* had left during the night.

I made a decision—now was the right time to attempt our escape. In a commanding voice I called, "Nata, get ready! It's time to go!" Then I asked the fisherman, "*Khosyain*, could we please have our clothing back? I will feel safer dressed in my uniform."

The fisherman pulled my English field jacket and peak cap out of his trunk. Nata had put on her town clothing and her black coat. As the fisherman was placing his old clothing back in the big trunk, he reasoned, "If tonight we have more guests who need to change from White uniforms, we can dress one more to look like a fisherman."

Nata and I expressed our gratitude to the fisherman and his wife for their hospitality, for giving us a refuge in their fisherman's hut, for the food they shared with us, and for saving our lives. I said, "We don't have anything valuable to give you for all your trouble."

"God forbid, we don't want anything from you!" said the fisherman.

And his wife replied, "Any mother would have done the same hoping that her son would be treated well by some other mother."

Nata embraced *khosyaika* and said she wished her that her son would return home safely and soon. The fisherman gave us his blessings for the road.

As we walked out of the hut, Nata commented, "What a simple and kind people

we still have in Russia! They didn't ask us to pay for anything they offered. They helped us just because we needed it."

"And who knows how many others they will help tonight... and tomorrow... and the day after tomorrow," I added.

As we reached the road to Chongar, we could see the railroad and the Chongarsky Railroad Bridge, which went straight across the Sivashy from the mainland to Crimea. We needed to make a run on that bridge and we ventured on the road that led to it. From the road we could see that there were no guards on this side of it and that was a good sign that the Reds were probably not there.

This deduction relaxed our caution and almost became fatal. The sound of bullets over our heads made us duck, jump into the ditch and run, bending forward. Nata was breathing heavily and I was afraid she would fall behind. I grabbed her hand and tried to pull her close to me. A machine gun rattled and bullets hit the pavement slightly ahead of us. I ordered Nata to lie down in the ditch. Then, hoping that the shots were not fired by the Reds, I decided to gamble and to show a sign of surrender. I took a white handkerchief from my pocket, tied it around my cap, and raised it above the level of the road. The machine gun stopped its rattle and we proceeded, creeping low to the ground.

All of a sudden, the ditch became wider and deeper and we found ourselves in a recently made deep trench. We heard a warning, "Stop! Who is there?" A sentinel appeared with the gun pointed toward me. We both recognized each other's White uniforms. The sentinel called for his officer and I reported my rank and my brigade.

"The name of your commander?" insisted the officer. I answered. "And who is she?" pointing at Nata, asked the officer again.

"I am an officer's wife," answered Nata for herself in a decisive manner. "My husband is..." and she turned her face away from me and whispered to the officer the name and the division of her husband. Then pointing at me she explained in a normal voice, "He is accompanying me. We are trying to go across the bridge."

"Please, Madam, you may go safely through the trench. Farther on, there is a no-man's land and you will be on your own. Good luck!" Then he gave a command to his soldiers, "Let these people pass!"

We walked through the very short trench guarded only by a half dozen soldiers. The trench ended in the natural hollow in the sandy soil. After that, all the way toward the Chongarsky Bridge was really a no-man's land.

My contused leg that had improved during my stay at the fisherman's hut started to hurt again. It was already almost dark when we reached the bridge. But the friendly moon illuminated our way.

Chongarsky Railroad Bridge had a very narrow walk with wide gaps between the planks and we had to be careful to step in the right spot. The strong northerly wind threatened to blow us off into the water. I wore only my light English field jacket and froze all the way through to the bones. Nata's coat could not protect her from the frigid wind and she was shivering at each sharp blow. We held on to each other, I helped her to keep steady balance, and she helped me not to slip down with my lame leg. It seemed we would never reach the far end of the bridge. Nata would ask me once in a while, "How far do we have to go?" When we finally stepped on solid ground, we embraced each other with relief. Only then we realized that it was already dark and the

friendly moon illuminated our way.

My leg by now had become swollen and I was dragging it on the ground. I was leaning on Nata's arm and she gave me as much support as her strength allowed her. After midnight we reached a small farmstead with a few peasants' huts clustered together. Unsuccessfully we tried to find a place to warm up and take a rest. All huts were full of people sleeping on the floor all the way to the entrance doors. Finally we stumbled on a very small structure that turned out to be a summer kitchen. The red flickering could be seen in the big kitchen stove. A faint moonlight was barely penetrating through the small window, but it was enough to find an empty bench and get close to the stove. Tired and frozen, we curled up close to each other and fell asleep, abandoning ourselves to the warmth and to a liberating feeling of safety from the Reds.

At the first light of daybreak we awoke at the same time and heard the heavy breathing of many people in that small structure that had filled to capacity during the night. There was no room left on the earthen floor. Nata and I carefully walked between the sleeping people and went out into the courtyard.

Outside we encountered a sharp morning chill. On the horizon the sun was just starting to show its first rays, promising warmth during the day. Nata and I decided to walk southwest on the wide unpaved cart road leading toward the railroad station. As we walked along the road, we could see the salty Crimean steppe become multicolored with the groups of refugees. All were rushing in the same direction toward the railroad station and the small town. There they were hoping to find information about the front, and maybe to find transportation toward the larger centers of population, where they could easier disappear in the crowd if the Whites could not stop further advancement of the Reds.

The crossing of Chongarsky Bridge started to show up on my leg, so swollen I could barely put my weight on it. I felt feverish and was shivering, although it was quite warm in the sun. I felt that I could lose consciousness at any time and Nata was worrying about me. When with her help I managed to reach the station of Taganash, I could barely understand all that Nata was telling me. I remember only that she told me that she was an officer's wife and that she was trying to reach him. As if in a fog I heard her voice requesting somebody on the station's medical unit to place me in a hospital in Dzhankoy.

I remember her saying, "Good-bye, Rostik!" And my last attempt was to follow her with my eyes as she left. Nata, the young woman who suddenly appeared in my life and awakened in me the flame of first love and gave me a few hours of happiness. I frantically screamed, "Nata, don't go away!" And then I lost consciousness.

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1. Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhaylov, pseud) "Nata" [in Russian] *Vo ymya chego?*, MS, TS, 1952, 8-14, trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro 1993. Also previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhaylov, pseud) "Nata" [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia* No's 8121, 8122, 8123, 8124, (New York: Rossia Publishing, May 20, 22, 27, 29, 1970). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. The so-called Salty Sea, east of Perekop.

3. See the chapters "White Army Volunteers" and "After the Battle."

4. A town located north of Perekop.

5. The Putrid Swamp.

6. *Budyennyets* - soldier in the Red Cavalry Division of Bolshevik General Budyenny.

7. The word *offizer* (officer) as mispronounced by populace.

8. Plural of *budyennyets*.

9. The host of the house.
10. Shag, coarsely shredded home-grown tobacco.
11. The hostess of the house.
12. A Russian shirt with a side fastening and a stand-up collar.
13. Small hinged casement windowpane used for ventilation.

## A Defeat In Crimea

**As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky**

**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

After I was kept a few days in the small railroad hospital on the station of Taganash, the fever diminished and my leg slightly improved, but I had not regained complete consciousness and was transferred to the larger military hospital in Dzhankoy. There, I gradually began to perceive what was going on around me. The sounds of artillery fire were moving closer and closer to Dzhankoy. Still half-conscious I pricked up my ears, "Where is it coming from?" My previous experience and training brought my senses on full alert, and listening to the other wounded soldiers' comments and observing what they were doing put me on the lookout.

One day I saw that those sick and wounded who were able to walk began to get up from their beds, hurriedly dress and walk toward the hospital exit. Like in a dream, I followed their example and got to the railroad station. On my way I heard the comments of the fleeing wounded who were saying, "The battle for Crimea could be considered already lost. It will be the same catastrophe as it was in Novorossiysk, where hundreds of officers, soldiers, and refugees were not able to get to the ships on time and were taken as prisoners by the Reds, who cruelly executed them without any trial." I understood that it was time for me to take a train to Feodosia and winter out in my uncle Pyetr's home.

When I reached the railroad station of Dzhankoy, there was already a multitude of people gathered on the station platform, and I learned the Reds had already interrupted the railroad and that no trains were going south from there. I decided that walking alone was safer than together with other sick and wounded soldiers. I chose to follow the railroad tracks that would lead me in the right direction. With my lame leg I walked slowly but steadily without much rest. I was trying to gain some distance from the Reds before my leg became swollen again and forced me to stop for a longer rest.

When I found myself in the vicinity of the railroad station of Grammatikovo, my leg was so swollen that I could no longer walk. I stopped at the railway switch point and asked the switchman to let me sleep overnight in his cabin. As a reference I told him that I was a nephew of Pyetr Makarovich Gladky, a stationmaster in Feodosia. But it became clear that this reference had backfired; the plate switchman didn't want anything to do with harboring the old master's relatives, as the Reds could be here at any time. I pleaded with him, but to no avail. Then I gave him an ultimatum, "I cannot walk anymore, if you don't let me in, I would sleep right here in front of your door." And I sat down on the steps. After a while the switchman's wife came out, invited me inside,

gave me some water to drink, and shoved me to the bench, where she put an old blanket.

Early in the morning I started to walk toward the small town of Old Krym, located about one hundred-fourteen miles from the station of Dzhankoy. My paternal grandparents lived there and I was planning to stop there for several days to rest my leg before proceeding to Feodosia. It took me several days to get there, stopping to stay overnight at the railroad stations. To feed myself I bartered my military boots, which I could not wear anyway with my swollen leg, for an old pair of larger size shoes, some bread, and dry fruit.

By late afternoon I came to my grandparents' home. Reds had not reached the town of Old Krym yet. My grandfather, Makar, was glad to see me and we talked at length about the situation in Crimea and about the options I had for the near future. My grandmother, Yelena, was less impressed with my arrival, especially when the time came to feed me. She served the meager supper that was already prepared for the two of them and they had to divide it now with me. The food consisted of a watery soup with a few pieces of vegetables swimming in it that she said were left from what they grew in the summer in their garden. Then she carefully divided a handful of small pieces of dry bread in three parts to soak in the soup. After many days of being hungry and eating only stale bread and dry fruit, I ate the hot soup with pleasure. Grandmother Yelena was afraid that I would stay with them for long time and that they would have to feed me. She complained openly and profusely at the table that they did not have enough to eat for themselves, making me feel guilty of depriving them of food.

The next morning grandmother didn't get out of bed and was moaning and complaining of being sick. I suggested to Grandfather that he call a doctor. But he just waved his hand in a sign of resignation, telling me that this was one of her old tricks that she uses when the things are not going as she wants them to be. I understood that my grandmother didn't want me to stay and told to Grandfather that I was leaving right away that morning to stay with my uncle Pyetr. After all, there were only about twenty-five miles left to Feodosia. There I hoped that my uncle could keep me in his home for a while and feed one more mouth, which my grandparents could not afford, because the food and their resources were scarce.

In the middle of November, 1920, I finally reached my last refuge in Crimea, my uncle Pyetr's home. At that time the town was still in the hands of Whites. After the death of his first wife, Pyetr Makarovich Gladky married Alexandra Ivanovna Tsarinova. They lived with their small daughter Xenia, and the two children from his first wife, a son Boris, who was about seven years old, and a daughter Lidia, about twelve years old. Pyetr Makarovich was the railroad stationmaster in Feodosia and was receiving good food rations at that time. I found his wife to be a very pleasant woman and she was good to her stepchildren and to me. There were no objections from her to keep me in their home for as long as it was necessary.

By the time I reached Feodosia there was no more organized resistance against the Reds by the Whites, who were in complete disarray and escaping on any available ship to Turkey, Rumania, and Greece. Then came the news that the Reds were closing in on Feodosia. Although this was expected for some time, it started confusion and panic; there were not enough ships to take all the White officers and soldiers who were waiting to embark. All were trying to escape the horrible executions, for which the Reds had

become notorious everywhere, but in Crimea they were especially cruel because of the large concentration of White officers. In addition, the towns were full of refugees who, escaping from the Reds, had evacuated with their families from the northern parts of the country to Crimea.

Thousands of people were rushing about on the pier in Feodosia seeking salvation from the Reds. But in vain. The ships were standing far away on the roadstead and there was no way to reach them. Fear and despair seized everyone anticipating savage reprisal that seemed not possible to escape. The fears of these people became a horrifying reality when the Reds occupied Feodosia and all other towns in Crimea.

## **Part Three**

### **Bolsheviks Have Seized The Power**



# Bolsheviks In Feodosia

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

After the Reds occupied Feodosia<sup>1</sup> the infamous CheKa<sup>2</sup> began its bloody work of searching out and eliminating the White officers and soldiers that had the misfortune of finding themselves at the southern shore of Crimea too late to embark on the ships to Turkey, Rumania, Bulgaria, or Greece. There were no trials; CheKa was executing them by firing squad on the shore of the Black Sea.

During the first weeks CheKa didn't touch the local people and concentrated on non-residents, whom they considered to be either White officers dressed in civilian clothing, or the refugees who had escaped from the northern part of the country. Most of these people were suspected to be White sympathizers and antirevolutionary elements; all were referred to by one all-encompassing name, "enemies of the people", which really meant the enemies of the Bolsheviks. These people were taken by the CheKa agents from homes, caught at the railroad station, or arrested on the streets, and they usually disappeared without a trace.

One night I found a wounded man hiding in my uncle's outhouse. My uncle Pyetr took him in the house and helped him to bandage the wound. The man told us that he was arrested in the railroad station and was taken with others to the seashore and shot. He fell unconscious on the ground, and when he had regained his consciousness, he realized that he was only wounded in the leg. He stayed quietly in the pile of dead men until the executioners were gone. Then he got out from under the corpses that had been left on the shore to be removed by the night crew. When darkness fell over the macabre scene and he could hear only the sound of the waves landing on the shore, he crawled on the sidewalk and against the fences and houses until he found a refuge here. The man was grateful for our help and he left right away to hide elsewhere.

Later Pyetr Makarovich found out from the underground railroad news what was happening in the other stations, where the CheKa began to conduct a purge of the railroads employees—the cleanup of this important communication and transport system from all possible "enemies of the people." There, the CheKa agents were investigating all employees who occupied any position higher than a simple laborer or worker. Everywhere all old stationmasters were removed from their posts for no reason, were interrogated, arrested, and thrown into jails, and some disappeared. Their families could not get any information from the CheKa about what had happened to their loved ones.

Therefore, when one day the CheKa agents came to the railroad stationmaster office and gave Pyetr Makarovich a summons to appear the next day in the local CheKa, he understood that he couldn't remain one more hour in Feodosia. As soon as they were gone, he asked his assistant stationmaster to take over his duties and returned home unexpectedly in the middle of his shift. He told his surprised wife that he had to go on an urgent *komandirovka*, which meant a trip on employment related matters, and that

he probably would be away for a few days. Very casually he said "good-bye" to her and to his children and asked me to see him off as far as a few blocks from his home.

On our way to the railroad station he told me the whole story about the summons and that he was escaping to Kharkov, where he had friends he could rely upon. He asked me to tell his wife about the summons only after a few weeks had gone by, and that I absolutely should not tell her where he would be hiding, because the CheKa agents knew how to get such information from the wives. "Tell her," he said, "when the time is right, I myself will let her know where I am and what she and the children should do to reach me." My uncle embraced me and asked me to help his family to go through the difficult times ahead of them. Then he looked at his watch and abruptly said, "It's time to go! I will arrive at the station just in time for the freight train going north."

Without any luggage that could make his departure too suspicious, he got on the first freight train going north. The old regulations hadn't changed yet, and as a railroad employee he could travel without being questioned as long as he was wearing his railway uniform and had his pass.

I remained with his family and followed my uncle's instructions of not telling his wife anything until later. The next day, early in the morning, two young CheKa agents came to search Pyetr Makarovich's home. From their behavior I deducted that they didn't know yet that he had escaped.

The agents dug in all drawers, looking for anything that could compromise him. They piled some papers and documents on his desk and among them I recognized one of my letters. I was terrified, because I knew what was written in it. I had written it soon after I got to the front and it was an inspiring letter full of youthful hope for the speedy victory of the Whites against the Reds. I looked at my aunt Alexandra and made a sign with my eyes and indicated with my head to get the agents out of the room. My aunt got the message, went to the kitchen, and from there cleverly invited the agents to have a cup of tea with her own homemade cherry jam. The trick worked out well. While my aunt was serving the tea in the kitchen, I quickly removed the letter from the pile and gave it to Varya, the niece of Alexandra Ivanovna, who hid it in her bosom. When the CheKa agents were gone, I got my letter back from Varya and destroyed the incriminating evidence.

After the escape of my uncle, my aunt was not able to receive her husband's food rations and could not provide for her children. I began to look for some kind of work to support myself and to help my uncle's family. Through the friends of my uncle I found a position as a telegrapher at the small railroad station of Saryhol, located not far from Feodosia.

However, I didn't have a chance to work there for long. On the third night, when I was working on the third shift, I answered a telephone call and a man asked me with the voice of official sternness, "Who is speaking?"

"I am a telegrapher," I answered very calmly, but my heart began to beat faster.

"What is your last name?" insisted the man.

I began to suspect that something unpleasant was coming up and reluctantly but still calmly answered, "My name is Gladky."

"Well, Gladky, come tomorrow morning to the CheKa Office," he ordered.

Now I knew that I should expect some trouble. But I answered in a steady voice, "Very well, I will come as soon as the first shift telegrapher comes in."

I thought about it. "How serious could it be? Maybe it is about my uncle Pyetr". And I planned and rehearsed all night what I would answer to all kinds of questions they could ask.

In the morning I went to the CheKa Office. The CheKa agent by the name of Koshyrin began to interrogate me. He wanted to know where I came from and what I was doing here, and where my uncle was. It helped me that during the night I carefully planned my biography and told it in a relaxed tone of voice:

"I came from Nikitovka to Feodosia to visit my uncle. Here I caught a typhoid fever. When I got well, there were no more trains going north and I couldn't go home. Now I have found a place to work and want to stay here because I like the climate."

As for my uncle, I said, "He left on *komandirovka* and disappeared. Nobody knows what happened to him."

As I was telling my story became clear Koshyrin was not convinced I was telling him the truth because he arrested me. I was confined in the cellar for about two weeks, and during that time Koshyrin interrogated me every day. Each time he asked me to tell him my biography I repeated the same story. During those two weeks in prison I saw many White officers and soldiers being led from the CheKa prison to be shot on the seashore. It was clear that I could not change my story if I wanted to remain alive.

After the two weeks Koshyrin did let me go, but he instructed that I come back in a few weeks for further check-up. I resumed my work at the telegraph, and when I returned for the check-up Koshyrin asked me to watch and listen to the employees at the station and to report to him in person about any anti-Bolshevik individual. I thought that maybe Koshyrin had really believed my story, and even begun to trust me, because the next time I came for a check-up, I had an offer from him to take care of one farmstead. But I told him I was not used to that kind of work and would not know what to do there. However, I was very cautious with Koshyrin. I felt that in his CheKa agent's mind there might be only seconds separating trust from execution. Soon I decided, "It's time to go!"

I began to look for the first occasion to get on the freight train to get out of Crimea and told my aunt Alexandra about it. At that time my aunt had received a message from my grandmother Yelena through the railroad telegrapher, who was my uncle Pyetr's good friend. She was notifying the only son who was living close to her about the death of his father and was expecting him to come and help her with the funeral. Since my uncle was hiding in Kharkov, I immediately went to Sary Krym and helped my grandmother to arrange the simple funeral.

She was very upset that her son didn't come and that none of her other children could be notified because there were no regular means of communication with the mainland. Therefore, I was the only one representing the whole Gladky family. Only a few neighbors of my grandfather came to say good-bye. But my grandfather had a funeral that he would have wanted, with the traditional Russian Orthodox rites. The Bolsheviks hadn't had time yet to close the churches in Crimea and to arrest all the clergymen.

Knowing my grandmother's stinginess, I offered her what I had saved from my wages to pay for my grandfather's funeral and told her that she had to pay the rest herself because it was all that I had. After the funeral I told my grandmother that she should remain in her own home until her son Pyetr returned from up north, or until my

father or her daughter Marusya could come and help her to make a decision about her future. I told her that I should depart soon to Nikitovka and would notify my father about his father's death. She wanted to know how soon somebody would come, but since I couldn't give her an answer, I only said, "As soon as they can."

When in the spring of 1921 my grandfather Makar Timofyeyevich Gladky died during the famine, he was ninety-six years old. He had outlived the four Czars, Alexander I, Alexander II, Alexander III, and Nicolas II. Later, within the family his children used to say that their father probably would have lived even longer if their mother hadn't starved him to death because she was not sharing fairly with him the little food that they could find.

One day in March of 1921 I was scouting around the railroad station in Feodosia trying to find out how I could get on one of the freight trains. By chance I encountered a former stationmaster of Nikitovka, Marcely Tytovich Gasnyevsky. Before the Reds occupied the station of Nikitovka, he had evacuated with his family to Crimea by attaching his railroad freight car to the last train going south with the retreating troops of the White Army.

Since his arrival to Feodosia, he had been living in the same car on the remote and no longer used sidetracks of the station. When the Reds occupied the town, for a while he was paying the railroad workers to keep them quiet about his being there. He and his family stayed mostly inside and kept the car doors closed. They came out only to get water and his wife went at the market in town to barter some clothing for food.

When the CheKa agents began searching everywhere for the "enemies of the people," Gasnyevsky had no other choice but to move as quickly as possible back north and to try to disappear in one of the large cities where he hoped no one would know him. His destination was the city of Kharkov. Marcely Tytovich was a very good friend of my father with whom he worked for many years and he gladly offered to accommodate me in his freight car, almost as a member of his family, and told me to move in right away and to wait with them. I told my aunt "good-bye" and left my uncle's home.

Gasnyevsky was able to find some of his friends, railroad employees, who would arrange that his freight car would be attached to the freight train going north. Early in the morning the day of the departure the locomotive engineer checked with Marcely Tytovich to see if everybody was in the car and told him to be very quiet until the train departed from the station, no matter how long it took. Then he wished him good luck, closed the car door, locked it, and maneuvered the car on the sidetracks until he attached it at the very end of the freight train.

Before departure, we heard the voices of the men walking along the train and banging on the doors of cars as they came closer and closer. We all sat quiet without moving. Then we heard somebody come to our car and bang several times at the door. We all kept so quiet, that one could not even hear our breathing. At last we heard the whistle of a conductor and the train started to move slowly. When finally it was going at its full speed, everybody took a deep breath.

At the first unscheduled stop between the stations, the locomotive engineer came to open the car door and asked if everybody was all right. I saw Gasnyevsky give the engineer a handful of gold coins. The train stopped many times near the villages, giving time to the passengers for bartering clothing for food. During these stops I saw that, although officially it was a freight train, several cars full of passengers traveling

north were attached at the end. When the train stopped at the stations, Marcely Tytovich would not get out of the car for fear of being recognized by railroad employees. He would ask me to fill the buckets with water, or to buy a newspaper.

When the train reached the station of Losovaya, there the rail line from Crimea joined the Southern Railroad line that went directly to Nikitovka, it was time for me to say good-bye to the host family and head for home. However, on the advice of Marcely Titovich, I did not return directly to Nikitovka, where everyone knew that I had volunteered into the White Army. Instead, I deviated to a single-track railroad branch leading from Nikitovka to Papasnaya and farther north. I decided to stop at a small station, Belyayevka,<sup>3</sup> where my aunt Marusya, my father's sister, was living. Her husband, Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev, had been a stationmaster there for many years. I hoped that they knew what was going on in Nikitovka. From there I could also communicate with my father through the railroad telegraph, or by sending him a message with some railroad conductor or locomotive engineer of a train passing through Belyayevka.

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1. See the chapter "A Defeat in Crimea."

2. CheKa – acronym for *Chresvychaynaya Kommissiya*, The Extraordinary Commission that acted as secret police against counterrevolutionaries from 1917-1921.

3. See the chapter "Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev."

## Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

The small railroad station of Belyayevka, located near the village of the same name, was on a single-track railroad branch leading from Nikitovka to Papasnaya and farther north.<sup>1</sup> The trains going in the opposite direction waited there for the right of way on the short span of a double-track. Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev, the stationmaster of Belyayevka, was a husband of Maria Makarovna Gladky, my aunt Marusya on the father's side. On my way home from Crimea<sup>2</sup> I decided to stop there and to test the situation in Nikitovka, to see if it was safe for me to return home.

As a young boy I occasionally went to visit my aunt Marusya and remember going fishing with my uncle Nikandr and his two sons. Knowing what happened to Gasnyevsky,<sup>3</sup> the former railroad stationmaster of Nikitovka, and to my uncle Pyetr Makarovich Gladky,<sup>4</sup> the former stationmaster in Feodosia, I thought, "They were stationmasters of the big important railroad stations. But who would bother with the small fish like my uncle Nikandr? And the tiny station of Belyayevka? What kind of strategic importance could it have to the Bolsheviks?" I was pretty sure that I would find everything there almost as it was before the Revolution.

As I remember, at the station of Belyayevka there were two small buildings. One was the station itself with a small apartment for the janitor, and the other was a house

with apartments for the families of the stationmaster and the two assistant clerks. And there were a lot of sheds, too, because they all had cows, horses, pigs, geese, hens, ducks, and dogs, and ever so many cats. They lived pretty well. The working hours for the stationmaster and his clerks were more than wonderful, twenty-four hours on duty and then forty-eight hours off. As for the janitor, he worked only eight hours a day, and at nights and on Sunday he was free to do just what he liked.

I remember that Nikandr Yakovlyevich was an important man in the village because he had two assistant clerks and a janitor under him. Everyone knew him well and respected him. In the old days in the Ukrainian villages everyone knew the governmental officials and employees and respected them, especially if they were friendly like Nikandr Yakovlyevich.

Nikandr Yakovlyevich lived almost like his two good friends the landowners, whose manors were in the vicinity of the station. He loved fishing and hunting. There were no rivers in the neighborhood, but on the landowners' estates there were lakes full of carp, fat and lazy, and very tasty, especially with sour cream.

The landowners were good-natured and often invited Nikandr Yakovlyevich to keep them company.

One of them would say, "Look, Nikandr Yakovlyevich, how about those carp? It's no longer a lake, it's nothing but fish soup."

And the other of them would drop a hint about the hares. "What about that gun of yours, Nikandr Yakovlyevich, it is lying idle as a neglected orphan. I can get you some small shot and powder from Kharkov. You will get some pleasure and a good dinner on top of that, and you will be doing me a favor too. The hares did a lot of damage to the trees last winter."

And he had many more invitations of that sort. That's how in the good old days my uncle told me he lived.

When I arrived at the station of Belyayevka, the first person I saw was the janitor. He was sitting on the steps of the station and leisurely smoking a *makhorka* cigarette, hand rolled from a piece of paper torn from the Bolshevik newspaper. The old janitor didn't recognize me right away, probably because I had changed so much since my last visit as a youth to see my aunt Marusya and uncle Nikandr. I had to explain to him that I was indeed Nikandr Yakovlyevich's nephew from Nikitovka.

"Oy-oy-oy, is it really you, Rostik?" said the old janitor, who was surprised to see me so grown-up. "Oh, my dear boy, I have to tell you very bad news about your uncle." And seeing the expression of concern on my face he quickly added, "No, no! Don't get too upset, he is alive, they are all alive. But, you see, those *chekists*<sup>5</sup> have ruined your uncle—they didn't give him his old job back. Only the three of us have been left to make this station work..."

And the old janitor explained to me how to find my uncle at his new home. They lived now in the village of Alekseyevka located close to the station of Likhachevo, on the same single-track railroad branch about twenty miles from the station.

When I arrived in the village I found the whole family outside tending the chores. Uncle Nikandr sat with me on a bale of straw near the cow shed and told me the whole story of what had happened to him since the Reds arrived in Belyayevka. My uncle recounted his story with a sense of humor, which I will try my best to remember.

By 1920 it became clear to Nikandr Yakovlyevich that the Bolsheviks had the

upper hand. His friends, the landowners, were arrested and their land was taken away. Some Bolsheviks were installed to manage their estates and it was pretty risky to go fishing for carp, since the lakes and the carp were declared to be the property “of the people,” and nobody had the right to fish there except the new Bolshevik managers, whose wives were selling the carp at the market in Kharkov. But to go hunting was frightfully dangerous because the guards had Red Army guns with real ammunition, and they protected very zealously the “people’s property” and only they and their friends could hunt there. Nikandr Yakovlyevich could only dream about the past. He went to work, spent his free days looking after his animals and poultry, and taught his sons to live as good Christians.

Then two vultures arrived from the Kharkov CheKa.<sup>5</sup> They took away Nikandr Yakovlyevich’s hunting gun and some leather for boots, two suit lengths of wool cloth, a bit of cash, a few gold coins, and several other items that caught their eyes, and, of course, they also took Nikandr Yakovlyevich with them. His wife, Maria Makarovna, cried with their sons, and he cried too, and for good reason, since for him it was not a laughing matter.

After that, his wife and the boys made several journeys to Kharkov to take food and blanket to her husband, for they didn’t know what food was given to prisoners, and it was more than likely that one wouldn’t get much to eat there. Nikandr Yakovlyevich was imprisoned in a bare cellar. Of course, at that time the Bolsheviks were just beginning to get organized and didn’t have the time to build enough prisons for all the “enemies of the people” they were catching everywhere.

Time went on, they forgot even to interrogate him, and at last, after nine months, they just let him go home. Surprisingly, they gave him back his leather and one piece of cloth. The other things they probably kept as a payment for his stay there. Nikandr Yakovlyevich did not protest. After all, he knew that one never gets anything without paying for it! When he arrived home, his wife was overjoyed and his sons were happy too. Maria Makarovna gave her husband a good bath, washed all his clothes, got rid of a lot of known and unknown insects, and looked after him just like you do when one has had a very serious illness and needs to be put on his feet again.

After a month’s recuperation Nikandr Yakovlyevich went to Kharkov to find out what had happened to his work, since the small station was functioning on its own with the two assistant clerks and the janitor. But most of all, he wanted to find out why he was not receiving his salary.

But in the city you can’t do things like that in a hurry. The buildings were large and several stories high. There were many long halls and numerous rooms, and the number of officials you’d never believe! And they kept sending him first to one place and then to another. He made the journey to Kharkov every day, except on Sunday, because at that time Sunday was still a day of rest. After three months of this pilgrimage he found one kind-hearted person who gave him some good advice, “Look, Nikandr Yakovlyevich, what you need to do is to go down to the lower floor, then up the steps on the left, and then go to the room on the right.”

So, he did go to the room on the right and found an official sitting there, who asked him, “What do you want?” Well, Nikandr Yakovlyevich told him the whole story from the beginning.

“What was your position?” asked the official.

"I was a stationmaster," he replied.

Then this comrade official looked at some notes and said, "I have no records of you here, although I've only been here four months. Your name is not on my list of stationmasters."

"Well, of course you wouldn't know about me, because I have been at the Kharkov's CheKa nine months, and then I spent a month recovering after that," Nikandr Yakovlyevich replied innocently.

"And what were you doing there?" asked the surprised official.

"I beg your pardon, perhaps I have not made it clear. They kept me there for nine months in the cellar," explained Nikandr Yakovlyevich.

"What's that? In the CheKa, did you say? Was it for some counterrevolutionary activities?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. I have documents to prove it."

"Give them to me."

Nikandr Yakovlyevich handed them over, and the comrade official read them: "Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev is released from the CheKa without consequences."

Of course the paper was all in order, signed and sealed and dated. "Tell me what does that means 'without consequences'?" asked the official.

"I don't know what these CheKa expressions mean, but I suppose it means that no charge was made against me for anything," explained Nikandr Yakovlyevich.

"That may be so," replied the official very sternly, "but you spent nine months in some dirty cellar in the CheKa and that's a stain on your character, and you cannot be allowed to continue to work as a stationmaster, so get out and don't come back here. Besides, since you are not working for the railways anymore, you have to immediately vacate the railway apartment."

Nikandr Yakovlyevich went home and told his wife all about his interview, and it made her very upset.

"Is this what they call 'without consequences'?" she asked. "They stole your gold coins, and several other things, and now you aren't allowed to go back to work, and have to vacate the apartment. Aren't those the 'consequences'?"

However, there was absolutely nothing they could do about it, so they found some rooms in a former clergyman's house in the village of Alekseyevka about twenty miles from the station of Belyayevka. The rooms were leading out of each other and this was an inconvenience, for they would have to walk through the two rooms to get into the third one. But there were no other places around where they could have a barn to bring their cow and chickens with them. So they moved there with all the family and what were left of their animals, a cow and ten hens—the others had already been eaten. And they began to live like peasants. His wife Marusya took the milk and butter and eggs to the market at Kharkov. They made a little profit, and what they spent for other necessary products about equaled what they earned, so they managed to make ends meet, and they were not quite bankrupt yet.

About two months after they moved to their new residence, a whole commission turned up at their lodging and marched straight into their rooms, without asking permission and without giving any explanation. They talked freely amongst themselves without paying the slightest attention to the inhabitants. They admired one of the rooms, the first one, which had the entrance door from the outside. In fact, they appeared to

take a lively interest in it. They took some measurements, discussed something, and then the senior one, the commissar, or someone of that sort, announced to Nikandr Yakovlyevich, "Citizen, you have to vacate this room immediately."

"What do you mean, vacate the room immediately?" asked Nikandr Yakovlyevich with disbelief.

"I mean you are to remove your furniture because this room is required for government purposes."

"And what about us?" protested Nikandr Yakovlyevich.

"What happens to you is of no interest to us. You can live in the other two rooms, if you wish. But this room is confiscated."

"We have no way out if you take this room."

"That is not our concern!" The senior official ended the discussion sternly.

Nothing could be done, they had to get out, because that's how justice operated in those days. A telephone line was installed in the confiscated room. The new authorities had it all fixed up in a week, all-correct according to the technical rules. Only one technical thing they forgot about, they nailed up the door leading from the first room to the rooms where Nikandr Yakovlyevich with the family supposed to live. And they did it while the whole family sat in those rooms and watched what was going on.

Nikandr Yakovlyevich and his family, who now had no entrance door to their rooms, sat and wondered, "How are we to get out of these rooms? There's no other door, and we are forbidden to go through the one that's nailed up." They sat there and wondered how in the world they would get out and feed their cow and hens and do all other necessary chores. The only escape seemed to be to fly out through the chimney, or to use the window to get out and, of course, to get back in, because, after all, they told them that it was all right to live in the two remaining rooms.

And at that point my uncle Nikandr finished telling me his story, "Well, that's what happened, my dear nephew."

My aunt Marusya was the first to climb through the window because she had to prepare the supper. The two sons passed to her through the window the bucket with the freshly drawn milk, a basket with eggs collected from their hens, and an armful of logs for the stove. When the supper was ready, aunt called us to the table. And they had all to climb through the window using the same method. Then Uncle Nikandr concluded the story, "That's how we live 'without the consequences;' we had no choice in the matter but to use our window as a door."

Although Nikitovka was not far away, my aunt and uncle did not hear from my family for a long time. I told them about what happened to Uncle Pyetr and about the death of my grandfather.

They listened to my story of having been in the White Army and, knowing that I had just returned from Crimea and they suggested that I stay with them for a while, until things settled down at home. After all, thank God, at that time they had enough food to feed one more mouth.

I stayed with Aunt Marusya and Uncle Nikandr until early spring. There was no way to find out anything about my family and I decided to try to contact them. I got on the freight train from Belyayevka to Losovaya, and from there I got on the freight train to Slavyansk, where I hoped to contact my father through a telegrapher who knew him. But the station there was full of CheKa's agents. I did not dare wait for the train going to

Konstantinovka, but decided to walk there following the railroad tracks. At the station of Konstantinovka everything was quiet, and I found my way to the telegraph office and asked the head telegrapher to contact my father in Nikitovka. After short greetings, we could not inquire much about family matters, I asked my father only what I wanted to know, "How are things over there?" and, "Do you think, it is okay for me to return home?" After receiving a positive answer I replied, "I will see you soon!"

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1. Orest M. Gladky, (O. Mikhailov, pseud.) "Dyadyushka Evlampiy," [in Russian], *Vo ymya chego?*, MS, TS, 1952, 130-131. [Author added more information and directed the editor to change the fictitious names to the real names of the people in the story—fictitious names in the original version were used to conceal and protect true identity from NKVD persecutions], trans. and ed. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Also as "Nikon Palych" MS, TS, 1952, (Ventnor, I. of W., Great Britain, 1954) trans. by Kate Hyne. Previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhailov, pseud.) "Dyadyushka Evlampiy" [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia*, no.4942 (New York: Rossia Publishing, August 28, 1952). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "Bolsheviks in Feodosia."

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. *Chresvychaynaya Kommissiya*, The Extraordinary Commission that acted as secret police against counterrevolutionaries from 1917-1921.

## Home At Last

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In April of 1921 I returned to Nikitovka on a freight train that had stopped on the secondary tracks. I avoided going to the passenger platform and instead walked to my home following the railroad tracks. On my way I encountered my father and my younger brother Igor who were on their daily walk.

"I am home," I said and embraced my father. He squeezed me in a tight hug keeping his cheek close to mine and sobbing from the emotion.

"Let me see you, Rostik," he said, releasing his embrace and holding my arms as if he were afraid I might run away. "Are you all in one piece?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. I am fine," I reassured him and asked, "And how are you? You look very pale and skinny."

"I am in convalescence after recuperating from the typhus spotted fever and hadn't had the time yet to put some color on my cheeks," my father replied.

There was a lot to talk about, but it was hard for both of us to start with the bad news. But, as I hugged my young brother Igor, he innocently hurried up in telling me, "Our mama died..."

In tears I embraced my brother consoling him and asked my father, "Why did she die?"

My father elaborated the details of what happened during the two years that I

was away from home. He told me that soon after I left to join the White Army, my Cousin Bonifaty had notified them that his mother, Maria Vikentyevna, contracted a typhoid enteric fever and that he and his wife Tatyana moved in to take care of her at home. But after much suffering she died. The death of her only sister was very painful and difficult for my mother, and when she and my father returned from the funeral in Taganrog she mourned and wore only black.

Only a few months after her sister's death my mother also contracted a typhoid enteric fever, but after she recovered from the illness she had a partial paralysis of her hands and feet and could not open her hands and keep her fingers straight. Igor got into our conversation and recounted how he massaged Mother's hands several times a day and helped her to regain partial mobility. For months she remained very weak; lack of adequate food did not allow her to fully regain her strength. Late in the fall of 1920 she contracted a typhus spotted fever, the second serious illness in less than a year. It was a fight, which her weary body could not win. My mother died on the second day of Christmas by the old calendar, one more victim of the epidemics ravaging the hungry population in 1920 during the famine and the civil war.

Entering the front door, I saw my older sister Anya washing the floor and I noticed that she was wearing a skirt made from a sack. I was told that all good clothes, except the warm winter clothing had been slowly bartered for food. Also bartered were all of my mother's embroidered and crocheted items that she was so proud of—handcrafted through the years by her skillful hands.

After emotional hugging and kissing with my sisters, I shared my news with the family. I started with the bad ones about the death of our grandfather Makar Tymofyeyevich Gladky and about the escape of Uncle Pyetr to Kharkov.<sup>2</sup> Then I told them about our aunt Marusya and uncle Nikandr's troubles.<sup>3</sup> And only then I recounted what happened to me after I left home to join the White Army.<sup>4</sup> In turn, my father and my sisters informed me about what happened during these years at home and in Nikitovka. We stayed up late into the night talking, asking questions, and exchanging our opinions about the new Soviet government.

In the days that followed my return, I observed the changes that had occurred in the life of my family. Anya was rarely at home because she worked as a nurse at the railway hospital and in addition she had private patients from the Jewish families, whom she cared for at their homes. It was probably she who had brought home from her patients the germs that contaminated our mother with both typhoid infections.

When our mother was ill, Anya took care of her at home after returning from the hospital. And, because our family could no longer afford to have a servant, my younger sister Vera, who was not yet fourteen, had to start helping with the home chores and cooking. When mother died, Vera suddenly found herself in charge of the family.

Vera's lot was not easy for a girl of her age. While our father and older sister were at work, she had the responsibility of looking after her small brother, Igor, and she had to take care of the house and prepare something to eat when there were no provisions in the house to cook from.

She found it hard to do it all alone, and asking her younger brother Igor to help her was a real pain. He slept a lot or just stayed in bed and read. Vera would ask him, "Igor, go get the wood for the stove."

"Uhu..." he would answer, but would not get up.

"Igor!" she would raise her voice louder.

"Uhu..." he would mumble, and he would not move.

Then Vera would scream at him in desperation, "Igor!!! I need the wood for the stove!"

The same was happening when she needed to get water from the courtyard. By the end of the day Vera would be tired, nervous, and hungry...

During these two years many changes had also occurred in Nikitovka. Bolsheviks had installed the new governing body, the so-called Soviet of Workers and Peasants Deputies, at the head of which was Commissar Orekhov, a former sailor from the Baltic Fleet, appointed by the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party.

Commissar Orekhov had a large red face with a long scar on one of his cheeks; he had very broad shoulders and a tall erect figure. As a commissar's status symbol, he wore a double-breasted black leather jacket and a cap with the red star. As the first act of his authority, he arrested the acting railroad stationmaster, who was a former assistant of Marcely Tytovich Gasnyevsky. Then he started an intensive search for all whom he considered to be politically untrustworthy individuals. And there were many of them—all those who could have been anybody in any position above the simple worker in pre-revolutionary Russia; those who in the past helped, served, or in any way supported Whites; or those who had opposed Bolsheviks by words or deeds.

I needed to work to receive rationing coupons for food. Friends of my father and mother helped me to find employment. First I worked in the railroad cooperative, where I was in charge of the rationing coupons. But soon this position was given to someone with connections to the Bolshevik party. After a few weeks I was hired as an office clerk at the Railroad School, thanks to the recommendation of the communist Korniyenko, a member of the School Committee and a former rail switchman. He knew that I had returned from a defeated White Army, but in talking to my father, he expressed the opinion that in those confusing times, I, as many other young boys in Nikitovka, made a mistake in judgment, and that, now I had learned my lesson and would not give any trouble to the new Soviet government. But most of all, he recommended me because he knew my father very well and greatly respected him.

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1. See the chapter "Maria Vikentyevna and Yurevich Family."

2. See the chapter "Bolsheviks in Feodosia."

3. See the chapter "Nikandr Yakovlyevich Myedvyedyev."

4. See the chapters "White Army Volunteers," "After the Battle," "Nata," "Defeat in Crimea," and "Bolsheviks In Feodosia."

## The Ukrainian Folk Dance Hopak

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

After the Bolsheviks took power in Nikitovka,<sup>1</sup> the name of the secondary school where I worked was changed from Gymnasium to Seven-Years Common Trade School,<sup>2</sup> but great changes in the program and teaching methods were not made at that time. The major subjects of study remained the same and only the course in religion was eliminated right away; religion was declared to be the "opiate of the people." In the beginning the director and the teachers remained in the positions they held before the Bolsheviks took over the government. For some time the school continued to function normally thanks to the dedication of the teachers, who were not being paid.

However, soon after the beginning of the new school year, the Seven-Years Common Trade School closed its doors for lack of funds and fuel. During those difficult times after our school was closed, Boris Alyexeyevich Polyevoy, the former director of the school, and his wife, Zinayda Pyetrovna, a teacher of mathematics, suggested that it would be more convenient to live together in their three-room apartment and make it easier to provide for heating, food and rent. So, Irina Victorovna Adler, a teacher of German, and I moved into one of the rooms of their apartment. There also lived their seven year old daughter Alochka and their former cook Polya who helped with the chores and cooking.

The other teachers from our school, teachers of geography and art, also decided to live together for the same reasons. They moved into another two room apartment. Zinayda Pyetrovna liked to visit them in the evenings and stayed there until very late. Boris Alexeyevich and I would wait for her, often standing near the doors to our rooms and talking until long after Alochka was put to bed.

Later that school year, all the women teachers from our school went to work in the Railroad School. There the conditions were somewhat better. The Railroad Cooperative supplied the teachers with some food and a meager salary was paid quite regularly. After the women found work, Boris Alexeyevich for the time being stayed home with his daughter and cleaned the house so diligently that when we returned from school everything was shining. Polya was a very good cook and always managed to prepare tasty meals from whatever we were able to get in the Railroad Cooperative, or bartered for with clothing.

One day Boris Alexeyevich went to Gorlovka for some reason; when he returned home he got very sick with a high fever. It was unfortunately a short and fatal illness, which the doctor diagnosed as cerebral meningitis. After his death, we women continued to live together in a collective.

It needs to be said that for a short period when the situation was unsettled as to who was in power, Whites or Reds, the majority of the railroad workers and employees were not starving yet. Because they were too important for the Reds, they were allowed to keep their cows, pigs, and poultry. And by using their right for free travel, they were coupling freight cars to any train and traveling to places where they could barter clothing for foodstuff. Their children did not feel hunger, which was already decimating thousands at that time in Russia. Moreover, well fed, they were seeking fun and entertainment, and many of them, girls and boys, wanted to stay after school, socialize, and dance. One of the teachers usually stayed to supervise them.

I was a great admirer of dancing, and one day when I stayed with the children after school I showed them the Ukrainian folk dance *hopachek*.<sup>3</sup> The children were delighted and pleaded with me to teach them to dance well. Interrupting each other,

they were telling me, “We will pay you!”

“We will bring you everything you want.”

“Bread...”

“Butter...”

“Potatoes...”

“Onions...”

This episode started our “dancing school for youth.” Zinayda Pyetrovna Polyevaya played the piano. Her skinny long fingers slid on the keys, playing “Waves of the Amur River.” And I, in a flared green silk skirt—the only one that was left, as all others were bartered for food—and wearing a big green bow in my hair, was fluttering like a butterfly and beating time in a lively manner, “One-two-three, one-two-three...” The cheerful red-cheeked young girls and well-built young boys were learning how to move gracefully with the waltz.

But the most popular dance was *hopachek*. The boys danced tirelessly, squatting and hopping, and the girls, provocatively flirting, were whirling around them—once coming closer, then going farther—and the others were beating time by clapping their hands. There seemed to be no limit to their fun.

Irina Victorovna Adler collected fees for the lessons, all kinds of foodstuff: bread, cereals, salt, sugar, oil, and vegetables. The onions were especially appreciated. Polya, who cooked our meals, was telling us that with onions she could make anything smell and taste appetizing. This way, during very hard times, by living in a collective, we were able to survive the famine and stock up some reserves for the lean days to come.

It is impossible to forget this “hungry *hopak*,” as we used to call it, and we remembered it often after the famine was over. But mostly, we blessed our old schools, which besides solid foundations in our special areas of knowledge, taught us to play piano and dance. Who could have anticipated that these skills would become so handy in one of the most difficult times in our lives?

Remembering my past now, I shake my head and wonder—how remarkable this Ukrainian folk dance *hopak* is! Later in my life, I met another person—very important, prominent person<sup>4</sup> in the history of Russia—who, for very different reasons and under unique circumstances, had danced it in the uncertain moments in his life to ingratiate the favors of a dictator.

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, “Hopak y politekh nizatsia v shkolye” [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniyakh* [Nikita Khrushchev in My Memoirs] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967) trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter “Starting Out In Life.”

3. Diminutive name for *hopak*, the Ukrainian folk dance.

4. See the chapters “Khrushchev As a Political Figure At Rabfak” and “Return To Slavyansk.”

## **Part Four**

### **Under The Bolsheviks' Rule**



# Polytechnization

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In the early summer of 1920, before the school closed its doors for the summer vacation, the director of our Seven-Years Common Trade School in Nikitovka received an order from *Narobras*.<sup>1</sup> The order was to send some teachers for the summer courses to learn new methods of teaching before the new school year began in the fall. Several teachers, including me, were chosen to represent our school.<sup>2</sup>

These retraining courses for selected teachers from across the Donetsk region were held in the town of Lugansk at the former pre-revolutionary technical school that had the equipment and shops for vocational training.<sup>3</sup>

The old elementary and secondary schools programs were now considered outdated for the revolutionary ideology in the proletarian society. It was considered that the old schools educated children to be "white-handed intellectuals."<sup>4</sup> The proletarian doctrine of the Bolshevik government called for new types of schools that would train children to be the "horny-handed sons of toil."<sup>5</sup> It was for this new system of training children that the teachers were being reconditioned.

A new slogan had been issued from the Soviet central governmental offices in Moscow: "*Polytechnization!*" All educational journals and daily newspapers published flashy articles featuring all kinds of ideas on "*polytechnization*." From the central offices down to the regional and local offices poured orders, instructions, circulars... Paper, paper, and still more paper! Many reams were written, read through and discussed, all about "*polytechnization*." Then the time came to retrain the teachers on how to implement this "*polytechnization*" in their curriculum.

From the very first day the training site resembled a beehive in a busy season. Men and women teachers stitched boots and shoes, made rivets, turned screw bolts and nuts, forged horseshoes, made stools, bound books, made buckets... They wove, sawed, hammered, and banged, shouted and made noise... They attended lectures on "*polytechnization*," on production methods, on the resistance of materials, on corrosion of metals, on scientific agriculture, on railway transport, on mining and metallurgy, and on many other worthy subjects. It was a hodgepodge of vocational, artisan, and industrial practical skills and the scientific lectures that were intermixed without any connection to each other—except that in the organizers' minds they somehow were related to this new concept of "*polytechnization*." Probably the reason for this odd selection was that, in a hurry to implement the orders from Moscow, the people they could find to teach these impromptu retraining courses and workshops were experienced only in those skills and subjects.

All trainees were busy; many were carried away with enthusiasm, and, most important, all were well fed and satisfied with the free and abundant food prepared by the participants as a part of the food preparation courses they were taking. All were hurrying to make shoe forms for their size, to make themselves shoes or boots, to sew

extra uppers for the shoes, and to cut a few extra pairs of soles and heels to take home for later use. In short, all provided for themselves with everything and anything they could get their hands on, especially items that were hard or impossible to find on the market.

Only occasionally in their few leisure moments did they ask themselves, "How are we going to fit all this '*polytechnization*' into the school curriculum? How will we teach first-graders to read and write while they are learning to work on a lathe? How will we teach them to count while they are making the horseshoes in the forge with a heavy hammer in their hands?" They tried to brush aside these thoughts by reassuring themselves, "Moscow will send all the instructions about that!"

At the end of the two months the retraining courses came to an end. A few days before, the director of the courses announced, "Comrades, tomorrow a comrade from the Central Committee Headquarters will give you a lecture on anti-religious training of children in school."

The next day, the enormous recreation hall was crowded with desks. Young and old, men and women teachers slowly made their way to the seats. The director was anxiously bustling about a long hall urging the slow ones to move faster, running in and out of the classrooms converted to dormitories, begging, demanding, and ordering people to hurry. At last, the recreation hall was filled to capacity and humming with a low murmur of voices and subdued conversations.

The lecturer arrived on time and stepped to the rostrum. The epaulets on his double-breasted former student's uniform jacket had been torn off and in place of the traditional metal buttons the ordinary black ones had been sewn on. Very slowly he placed his saddle shaped cap and heavy bulging briefcase on the desk. From it he pulled a bundle of posters hand-printed with black, large, thick capital letters. Then he got out another equally large stack of papers covered with straight typewritten rows and carefully placed them in the middle of the table.

Methodically, he attached the posters on the walls using multiple drawing pins. The posters in big block letters proclaimed Bolshevik slogans:

"DOWN WITH RELIGION!"

"RELIGION IS THE OPIATE OF THE PEOPLE!"

"IN A FREE STATE THERE IS NO ROOM FOR RELIGION!"

They went on, and on in this religion degrading tone. After hanging up the posters, the lecturer took his time to return to the rostrum, polished his pince nez, and poured himself a glass of water. Then he drummed on the glass with a pencil until the audience came to attention and, finally, began his lecture.

"Comrades, teachers! The revolution gave us half of our freedom. But we find ourselves still under the domination of religion. Religion not only denies us the possibility of knowing true freedom, it also hinders our revolutionary progress; therefore, we need to free ourselves from it. You, the builders of human souls, are called upon to free the children's minds from this unnecessary rubbish that religion has been proven to be. The greatest of socialist thinkers, Karl Marx, has said, 'Religion is the opiate of the people.'"

The speaker went on and on, reading from his copious notes, denouncing the evils of religion and emphasizing how it interferes with the Bolsheviks' agenda.

There was not a sound in the hall. The audience, with bent heads, persistently

gazed at the floor. Not one pair of eyes was raised at the lecturer during his long address. The strange silence and stillness made the comrade from the Central Committee nervous. He probably felt as if he was reading his lecture to an empty hall. Purposefully, several times he raised his voice, dropped it again, then stopped suddenly and, as unexpectedly, began to shout, and stopped again without finishing the sentence. He tried every trick to make an impression on his audience but the hall was dead; not the slightest sound came from the mass of people sitting in front of him.

At last, the two-hour lecture came to an end. The speaker took a glass of water and sipped slowly, waiting for some reaction from the teachers. But the hall remained quiet and no one moved. The lecturer put down his glass, hurriedly pushed his notes back into the briefcase and, almost running, rushed out of the hall. The teachers were stunned and didn't know how to react. They still sat quiet and motionless, till they heard the familiar voice of the director of the courses, "Comrades, break for lunch! After lunch, return here for questions on the lecture."

Getting up heavily from their seats, the teachers went to their rooms and then for lunch. Halfway along the hall one could hear hesitant attempts at conversation that stopped unfinished. All had a feeling of unpleasantness and disappointment; it was not quite disgust and not quite sadness. It felt like they had heard something shameful and, for this reason, the teachers avoided meeting each other's eyes or talking about it.

After lunch, the audience reassembled in the big hall as slowly and as unwillingly as before. When all the seats were occupied, the comrade from the Central Committee appeared again at the rostrum. "Has anyone any questions they wish to ask?" he addressed the silent teachers. He looked around over the bent heads staring at the floor and saw one hand raised high.

"Your question?" he asked almost cheerfully, being glad to have at least one response. There was a rustle of movement in the hall as all raised and turned their heads. All eyes were fixed on the young woman teacher who was already standing up.

"I have no questions to ask, but I wish to make a statement regarding the lecture," said the young woman resolutely and she walked toward the rostrum. The lecturer made room for her. He was triumphant, at last he had broken the icy silence!

The young woman ascended the rostrum. Her head was slightly raised, as she looked straight at the seated people. Her voice sounded firm and confident as she started to speak.

"One thousand nine hundred twenty years ago, Christ was born. One thousand nine hundred twenty years ago, by his birth, He brought to mankind the great truth, whereby the world recognized God. Christ brought the light and joy of personal contact with God and taught mankind to love Him and their fellow men. The life of Christ on earth, his teachings, and his sermons, are the foundations on which, up till now, we have built and will go on building the training and the instruction of children."

Through a window the audience could see heavy gray clouds part, unveiling a patch of turquoise autumn sky. The sunlight spilled out bright rays and lighted up the golden hair of the young woman and, shining through the soft tendrils of her hair, made a bright halo round her head. At that moment she was extraordinarily beautiful and majestic. Her large deep blue eyes shone, and in them burned the unquenchable fire of faith.

Scores of eyes from the audience followed with an intense attention her every

movement and were fascinated with the serene expression on her face. All were trying to catch every word of her surprising and wonderful speech, fearing they would lose the sound of her flowing velvety voice. All forgot where they were, what they were there for, and why they were there. All their attention was fixed on her, who, inspired by her devotion, was able to express so truthfully what was in their hearts.

The young woman, feeling her spiritual unity with the audience, continued to speak with even greater fervor about the life of Christ, of his death and resurrection. Then she looked at the lecturer from the Central Committee Headquarters, who was standing at one side of the desk and nervously manipulating his briefcase, but unable to stop the young woman from continuing her speech.

The woman continued, "You deny God and wish to take our faith from us. You can do this only because you have the power. But remember, neither denial, nor prohibition, nor martyrdom did kill the faith of the first Christians. Now, the people are again going to the catacombs. Once more the people will suffer, but you cannot kill their faith. You can only compel us by force to be silent about God, but remember that the everlasting judgment will require you to answer for this."

Finally, she raised her voice and concluded her speech with these words, "You would want us to maim the children's souls. No! In the name of Almighty God we cannot do this!" Then with dignity she left the rostrum to resume her seat. And, as she calmly walked, the sunrays lighted up her golden hair. All eyes and thoughts of the teachers were turned toward her, toward that young Russian woman who dared to speak the truth.

It was impossible to subdue the excitement that took over the teachers after her speech. Everyone began to move in the hall. Everybody tried to get near her, to shake her hand, to embrace or kiss her, and to say a kind and warm word to her.

The lecturer hovered for a while uncertainly near the rostrum, then grabbed his briefcase and cap and unnoticed by the audience hastily crossed the big hall and disappeared behind the wide doors.

That night was stormy, with wind of almost hurricane force. The tearing and uprooting gale bent the age-old trees to the ground and dashed great streams of rain against the windows, tore off the roofs and signboards, and blew down fences. In the darkness of the old school building there were strange wild noises. They sounded along the endless halls and in the empty classrooms. The sounds of water pouring down and the fury of the wind were interjected by loud noises—something groaned, something cracked, crashed, and loudly broke up into the smallest pieces; something banged, roared, and bellowed like an infuriated beast. And suddenly, amidst the maddening chaos of sounds and movements, the lightning flashed through the pitch darkness in sharp zigzags splitting the obscurity of the night, and then a deafening peal of thunder followed, shaking the ground, drowning the noise of the wild storm and, with a loud rumbling echo, rolled away into the night...

In the morning the departing teachers learned that the courageous woman had disappeared from her room. Reliable rumors reached their ears that on that frightful stormy night the agents of the Lugansk CheKa arrested and shot that unknown Russian woman—wife, mother, teacher, and devoted Christian—who dared to stand up boldly and to speak in the name of the Great Truth.

With this depressing news, the teachers—carrying fully loaded suitcases

containing as much as possible of the handmade items and bringing home benches and buckets made during their workshops—departed to their places of employment. They were ready to start the new school year to teach with the new methods that they had learned. They didn't anticipate the numerous difficulties that awaited them in implementing these methods. Their schools didn't have the workshops, nor did they have the tools, laboratories, or the means to equip them. The nearby factories and plants were either in ruins and disrepair after the civil war, neglect, and pilferage, or were in such deplorable condition that they could not serve as places for teaching students vocational skills.

After many experiments, the schools went back to the traditional methods of the old pre-revolutionary schools, although new textbooks were full of revolutionary and anti-religious text and slogans. And many disappointed teachers left the schools.

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1. *Otdel Narodnogo Obrasovaniya* - Department of Popular Education.

2. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Hopak y polityechnizatsia v shkolye," [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniakh* [Nikita Khrushchev in My Memoirs] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967) trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

3. Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhailov, pseud.) "Pravdy radi" [in Russian] *Vo ymya chego?*, MS, TS, 1957, 15-17. As recounted by Antonina G. Gladky. Also, previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhailov, pseud.) trans. W. Kate Hyne. "For the Truth" *Christian Democrat* vol. 8, no. 6, (Oxford, Great Britain: The Catholic Social Guild, Hinckley, Leics: Samuel Walker printers and publishers, June 1957) 347-352. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

4. A degrading cliché used during and after the revolution for anyone who didn't belong to the laboring class.

5. A meritorious cliché used during and after the revolution for anyone who did belong to the laboring class.

## The Courtship And Marriage

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

In the summer of 1921, at the end of the school year, the teachers with whom I shared the apartment decided to move from Nikitovka.<sup>1</sup> Irina Victorovna Adler returned to her native Latvia, and Zinayda Petrovna Polyevoy returned with her daughter to her birthplace in Crimea. At the same time, in addition to teaching Russian, I was offered a part-time position as a secretary by the Railroad School Committee and received permission to live temporarily in the school office.

The school office was a big room divided by two wide bookcases. Near the entrance door stood two desks, one for the school office clerk, and the other for the secretary. Behind the bookcases was enough space for my bed. To heat the office there was a small cast iron stove on which I also cooked my meals. My students supplied me with some foodstuff, not much, but I had some variety compared to many others at that time.

Many of my former students from gymnasium were now grown and some of the boys who had been fighting in the civil war were returning home. When somebody told me that Orest Gladky had returned, I didn't even remember how he looked. I had him as a student before he volunteered with his friends in the White Army.<sup>2</sup> All I remembered about his general appearance was that he was a skinny boy with dark hair and brown eyes, and that as a student he didn't do exceptionally well in my French class. From the time he returned in Nikitovka, he attended a few evening gatherings with some of my friends. They told me that once someone was talking about me, and Orest stated that he didn't like me. During the summer he was hired as a school office clerk, and there we were, by chance, working together.

During the two years that he was away, he had changed a lot from the time I remembered him as my student. He had left home as a youth and returned from the civil war a grown up young man. I knew his mother well and respected her as a teacher and a fine woman. I also liked his father, who was involved with the choir and the concerts benefiting the cultural life of the community.

Now that we were working side-by-side in the school office we had enough time during the day to talk and to find out many things about each other. He was very cautious—understandably it was politically dangerous—and didn't talk at all about being a volunteer in the White Army. But among some of the things to talk about in those days was the scarcity of food. Orest complained to me many times that in his home all they had to eat was boiled millet seeds, which they received with the coupons from the railroad cooperative, forty pounds a month for all four of them. And that was the only food they had to eat, as he repeated many times, "Boiled millet for breakfast, boiled millet for lunch, and boiled millet for supper—every day, day after day. We all are fed up with it!"

He was so pathetic in expressing his hate of millet that he aroused my sympathy and one day I asked him to stay after work and share my special meal, fried potatoes. Well, this started our friendship. He got used to staying after work and eating with me. Then after the meal we began to go out for a walk on the railroad tracks, and after a while we found out that we liked each other and we fell in love. Soon we were talking about getting married.

Mikhail Makarovich, Orest's father, came by the school office several times to visit with us. Then Orest told me I was invited for a boiled millet dinner at his home. At the table Orest mentioned our plans to get married, to which his older sister Anya promptly and proudly replied that I was "not right" for her brother, that I was "eight years older" than he was. She was ready to enumerate other reasons, but her father stopped her comments right there and told her, "It is not your business to decide whom your brother is going to marry."

On February 23, 1922, the day of my birthday, we got married by registering at SAGS.<sup>3</sup> Marriage in the church was out of the question—I could lose my work as a teacher immediately. However, when nobody could see us we sneaked in the church, crossed ourselves, and said a prayer. Shortly after, by the order of the Commissar Orekhov, the church was closed and was remodeled into a movie theater.

After we got married, we lived in the school office behind the bookcases in my living space and slept on my small single bed. One night I woke up from a strange rustle, "Sh-sh-sh-sh..." I turned on the light. All walls were covered with black cockroaches.

Probably the smell of food I was cooking in the office had attracted them from the neighboring houses where the food was scarce. We slept the rest of the night on the other side of the bookcases on the office desks. In the morning all cockroaches disappeared. Soon after that incident we found a small apartment across the street from the school.

My students supplied me generously with onions, which I used in every meal to add taste. One day I was busy correcting students' papers and cooking at the same time. I burned the coarsely cut onions that I was frying with a small amount of sunflower seed oil as a condiment for the soup, which was simply water, crushed potatoes, and salt. I could not afford to throw the onions away—those were all that I had. The burned onion flakes swimming in my soup resembled the cockroaches and reminded us about their nocturnal invasion only a short time before. Orest laughingly called it a "cockroach soup" and we could never forget it.

As a school clerk, Orest had to travel to *Uchprofsorg Zheleznykh Dorog*<sup>4</sup> in Slavyansk to certify school documents and to receive a huge bag with new money for teachers' salaries. Money at that time was really not worth the paper on which it was printed. The bills were called the *Sovznaky*.<sup>5</sup> The new money was printed in Leningrad in large denominations of thousands, ten thousands, hundred thousands, and millions. The prices skyrocketed by the hours. At one time the price of a cup of coffee was as much as one million *Sovznaks*.

Although hustle and bustle of everyday life was a constant factor in our lives, for me and for my husband this was also a time of tender youthful joys of love. Remembering those happy days many years after, I wrote a short poem.<sup>6</sup>

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1. See the chapters "Starting Out in Life," "Ukrainian Folk Dance Hopak," and "Politechnization."

2. See the chapters "White Army Volunteers," and "Home At Last."

3. SAGS - acronym for *Otdel Sapisy Aktov Grazhdanskogo Sostoyanya* - The Civil Registrar Office.

4. *Uchprofsorg Zheleznykh Dorog* - acronym for *Uchastkovy Professionalny Soyuz Rabochikh Gosudarstvennykh Zheleznykh Dorog* - The District Office of Professional Union of the State's Railroads Workers.

5. *Sovjetskiye Znaky* - the Soviet marks.

6. See the poem "I Was In Love."

## I Was In Love

*By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky*

I was in love in the spring  
When the lilac trees were flowering  
And the whole garden was in bloom.  
In the sultry summer  
My love was in full flame.  
In the golden autumn

I had my wedding  
Under multicolored trees.  
In the snow white winter  
I tenderly caressed  
My spouse desirable.

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Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky. "Da, ya lyubyla" [in Russian] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1983) trans. by the author, ed. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1988. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## It's Time To Go!

**As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky and Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

In the early spring of 1922 the militiamen became visible on the streets of Nikitovka. By pure chance, I found out very soon that they were bringing summonses for people to present themselves in the CheKa's office. It happened one day when I was passing near the house of my friend Ivan Dekan and stopped on the sidewalk to talk with him. Ivan was one year older than I and he also served as a volunteer in the White Army. A very young militiaman stopped uncertainly near Ivan's house and checking on the list in his hands asked politely, "Do you know if comrade Dekan lives here?"

"That's me," answered Ivan with apprehension.

"Here!" The young militiaman handed him the paper changing his voice to convey an order, "You have a summons to appear tomorrow in the local CheKa's office. And be sure to be there on time!" he warned.

Trying to speak jokingly, I asked the militiaman, "I am his friend, my name is Orest Gladky, is my name also there on the list?"

The politically inexperienced young militiaman carefully checked on the piece of paper and said, "Yes, your name is here too. We will be delivering summonses on your street later this week."

"A-a-a..." I nodded. Then, looking at my friend I said, "See you soon, Ivan. I have to hurry home."

"I understand," he confirmed with a nod, as if he wanted to say, "Maybe you still have time to sneak out from their claws."

I returned home immediately. There was no time for waiting, possibly to be arrested tomorrow. As I entered the room I simply stated to Tonya, "It's time to go!" She looked at me with surprise, and I explained to her what I had found out from the young simple-minded militiaman.

Tonya agreed with me that there was no time to waste.

We quickly collected the few possessions we had, and rushed to the station, stopping only at the telegraph office to tell my father that we were leaving for Yusovka. We decided that in a big town it was easier to disappear in the crowd. We did not need to buy tickets because as employees of the railroad school we had permanent passes

for free travel to all local destinations. We departed on the first train that was going in that direction.

The first place to stay that came to our minds was the only address in Yuzovka we had for Lev Mironovich Tatarsky, a young man who had been courting Tonya's older sister, Tanya. He met her when she was on an internship as a dentist in Yuzovka's mill hospital. When Lyeve, as everybody called him for short, asked Gavriyl Daniylovich for the hand of his daughter, Tanya's father told him that he would not allow his daughter to be married to a Jew, unless he converted to the Christian faith. Well, Lyeve agreed, because he was so much in love with beautiful Tatyana. They had to arrange for his baptism, which had to be followed by the traditional Christian Orthodox marriage ceremony. All this was to take place without fanfare in the small village of Nikolskoye, the native village of Tanya's father, where Lyeve was unknown.

When we arrived in the town of Yuzovka, Tanya was in Slavyansk to make arrangements in the village of Nikolskoye. Therefore, we felt that we were almost related to Lyeve and stopped to see him. He had a large apartment and we asked him if he could accommodate us for a few days until we could find a place to live. He said that we could stay as long as we needed in his room, because the next day he was joining Tanya in Slavyansk and would not return for a couple of weeks.

Lyeve shared the apartment with several other young men. We stayed in his room for more than a week and had to share the kitchen and bathroom with Lyeve's young men companions. These young men behaved very strangely. I warned Tonya not to go out of our room when she could hear them in the hall, because I saw them running naked in the apartment and horsing around very noisily with each other in their rooms. She couldn't understand why they behaved this way, but I was reluctant to explain to her that they were homosexuals. Only later, she found out that their was a deviant behavior about which she, who grew up in a sheltered environment, had never heard anything.

After their marriage Lyeve and Tanya found another apartment and settled in Yuzovka. Right from the first months we understood that Tanya was not very happy. She complained that Lyeve was spending a lot of his time in his old apartment in the company of his boyfriends. But she decided to give him some time to get used to being married.

When the bride and groom came to Yuzovka, we had already found a small apartment on Eleventh Lane. It was not far from the place where Tonya found temporary employment as a secretary in the newly opened Technical School of Mining. In the fall of 1922, in the same building was opened Rabfak,<sup>1</sup> a new type of secondary school for adult workers, and Tonya was hired there to teach Russian language and literature. Meanwhile I found a job as a clerk in one of the town's government offices, but I made a major mistake by giving as a reference that I belonged to the railroad union—it led directly to Nikitovka. As soon as the political purge of the town's employees got started, I decided not to wait my turn to be investigated. I came home and said to Tonya, "It's time to go!"

But Tonya—who was working temporarily as a secretary during the summer for the rector of the Technical School and the Rabfak professor Mukhachev—suggested asking him if he could arrange for me to attend Technical School Of Mining without submitting a worker's certificate from the factory or coal mine. Professor Mukhachev arranged it, and I was accepted at the first-year course for that school year. Only later we

found out why Mukhachev was so generous and benevolent with us.

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1. Rabfak – acronym for *Rabochy Fakul'tyet* - Workers' Faculty School.

## The Town Of Yuzovka

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Before the revolution the town of Yuzovka was a large industrial center<sup>1</sup> located in the middle of the Donets Basin.<sup>2</sup> Surrounding the town were numerous coalmines producing one of the highest and most prestigious grades of coal—anthracite. The black peaks of the *terrycons*<sup>3</sup> surrounding the coalmines like the colossal sentinels, could be seen disappearing on the horizon in many directions from the town. On the town's outskirts there was a large steel mill with a small hamlet and its own clinic that was built before the revolution.

During the day, a cloud of coal dust from the mines hung over the town and, in the evening, it was illuminated by the dark-red glow from the steel mill. Straight streets, running from the steel mill into and through the town, did not have names, instead they were numbered and were called lanes.

The First Lane stretched through the center of the town. There, in the center, was the cathedral, encircled by the square, the market place, and a great number of stores, shops, and little shops. It was there that the pulse of the town's life and the neighboring hamlets was located. In the past, Yuzovka was not only an industrial but also a commercial center with a large number of Jewish merchants having a successful and brisk trade. There the peasants from the neighboring villages brought their produce to the market and the workers and employees from the surrounding coalmines hamlets came to shop.

Although I lived in Yuzovka only two years, I have both very fond and very sad memories about the town. After escaping from their family home, my parents lived there. There, during the typhoid epidemic raging after the revolution, my mother and my younger sister Olga died, never fulfilling their dreams to return home.<sup>4</sup> There, in 1923, my daughter was born. I named her Olga in memory of my dear sister. There, I started teaching adults, men and women workers, and this influenced the direction of my lifelong career in adult education.

During the revolution and civil war, commercial and industrial activity in town came to a standstill. Only at the beginning of 1921, when the government introduced the New Economic Policy, called NEP, that allowed limited private commerce, life in Yuzovka was rejuvenated by free commerce. Many private stores and shops were opened, and on the open market the number of the small petty traders grew rapidly, like mushrooms overnight. Suddenly, all kinds of products appeared in abundance and the prices began to fall. The peasants were bringing their produce to the markets because

they finally could find and purchase the products they needed for themselves.

In 1920, when the Soviet government began a general rebuilding of the industry ravaged by the revolution and civil war, priority was given to restoring the railways and the coal mining industry. At the same time, by an infusion of funds, the government began to develop and promote a wide variety of educational programs for adult workers. Short-term courses and special schools for adults were opened in all industrial centers. These schools were intended to prepare the new specialists, and lower, middle and upper level managers, as well as the new leaders for mining, industry, and agriculture; in short, the new intelligentsia. The Soviet government did not trust the old intelligentsia—the pre-revolutionary engineers, technicians, and managers from the old Russia—who were considered to be the bourgeois class. Socialist doctrine advocated that only the people of proletarian and poor peasant origin could build the new socialist society. All these changes were expected to improve economic conditions for the miners and the rest of the population in the Donetsk region and in the town of Yuzovka.

In 1921, on First Lane in Yuzovka, in the building of a former School of Commerce, new Technical School Of Mining was opened; in 1922, in the same building, Rabfak, was opened. Rabfak was a new type of secondary school for adult workers. The objective of this school was to prepare specialists and leaders for mining and industry. During four years of study at the Rabfak, students were to receive a general secondary school education and to be prepared for entrance into higher education institutions.

Tuition for the qualified students was free. In addition they received a small monthly stipend, clothing, and free school dormitories or rent allowance for those who could not be housed by the school. A cafeteria and a barbershop were also located in the school building. The teachers at the Rabfak were well provided for; they received a good salary and food provisions.

In July 1922 I was able to find a position as a teacher of Russian language and literature at the Rabfak. At that time the principal of the Technical School Of Mining and of the Rabfak was comrade Pughach, and the rector was Professor Mukhachev, a former professor at the Kharkov's Technological Institute. For the two months that remained until the beginning of the new school year, Professor Mukhachev appointed me temporarily as a secretary at the Rabfak office. I was involved with the formal registration of students and the required documentation of their eligibility for acceptance to the Rabfak, which were rather strict.

The men and women workers had to be between eighteen and thirty-five years old; they also had to present documents certifying that they had been working for at least three years. In addition, they had to be selected and recommended by the Bolshevik party and trade union committees at their coalmines, factories, or plants. Also, the students had to pass an entrance examination to establish their basic knowledge and, finally, to be screened by the Rabfak's selection committee. For many workers Rabfak was not only a chance to receive a free education, but also an opportunity for future promotions at their jobs and in the Bolshevik party hierarchy.

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Yuzovka - Stalino - Donyetsk," [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moykh vospominaniyach* [Nikita Khrushchev in My Memoirs] MS, TS, (Manchester, CT, 1967) trans. and ed. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. Coal basin in eastern Ukraine located near the River Donets, a tributary to the River Don.

3. The high, cone-shaped waste heaps formed from the black rock discarded from the mines.

## A Rabfak Student Nikita Khrushchev

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

It was the first of September, 1922, the beginning of the school year at the Rabfak.<sup>1</sup> About three hundred workers and coal miners were ready to take their places at the desks and to try their abilities to learn after being out of elementary school for many years.

Excitement reigned in the teachers' room. The teachers were getting acquainted with each other; they were sharing their ideas about the forthcoming and unusual task of teaching adults. Selection of the teachers was very good; all the best teachers from the town of Yuzovka were teaching at the Rabfak. I still remember most of them: the chemistry teacher Mikhail Mikhailovich Platonov, who had completed his education abroad; cheerful and bubbling with life Olshanchenko, a geography teacher, who had traveled all over Russia and had been abroad before the revolution; very cautious and prudent teacher of history, Chetyrkina, who got her education at the famous Besstuzhevsky Courses; the well-known Goryainov, a teacher of Russian literature; the two young teachers of mathematics, Zolotareva and Abramov, who were always so busy solving mathematical problems that they didn't have time to exchange words with the other teachers in the teachers' room.

Then there was a Bolshevik Zablodsky, the only one whom everybody was calling, "comrade, *tovarishch*,"<sup>2</sup> because all other teachers were called by their first name followed by their patronymic<sup>3</sup> name. Comrade Zablodsky was teaching political education at the Rabfak and, according to the students, was following word for word the textbook "The Alphabet Of Communism" by G. Zinovjev.<sup>4</sup> At the same time he was also a student at the Technical School Of Mining located in the same building as the Rabfak.

The bell called for the beginning of the lessons and the teachers left for their classrooms. Everybody was keeping in mind not to forget the new greeting: "Comrades students!"

I entered the classroom of First Course A. Thirty-five students were sitting in front of me, two at each desk. After I finished taking the attendance and made my acquaintance with each student, I started to introduce them to the content and a plan of work in my Russian language course.

At that moment the new student entered the classroom. His appearance wasn't different from the others in any specific way. He was slender, of average height, and was wearing an old jacket over a workman's shirt, a pair of trousers stuffed into boots that were covered with coal dust, and he wore a visored cap which he didn't remove entering the room. I asked his name.

"Nikita Khrushchev," he answered. Some students looked at him, as though they had heard this name before.

"I don't have you on my list," I told him after checking in my register and not finding his name.

"I have been accepted just now as a student," he answered. "Here is a note from Principal Pughach."

And he handed to me a small slip on which I read: "Nikita Khrushchev. Date of birth: April 17, 1894. Accepted at the First Course A."

"All right, Comrade Khrushchev, please sit down," I invited him, showing the empty place on one of the desks.

During my two years of teaching at the Rabfak, I spent more time with Nikita Khrushchev than with any other student. His knowledge of Russian grammar at that time was very limited and he was attending supplementary tutoring sessions with some other students.

It needs to be said that teaching adult students at the Rabfak required the teacher to be very tactful and capable of helping the students, who must learn without losing their self-esteem.

First, it was necessary to take into account the feelings of adult workers and try to spare their pride. Some of them

were ashamed to show that although they knew the rudiments of reading and writing, they were novices to more or lesser degree with Russian grammar and correct spelling. They had difficulty separating Russian and Ukrainian words and expressions, which were very commonly intermixed in the popular spoken language in that region.

And second, it was necessary to select the most effective methods of teaching, so that in four years the students could learn as much as in the usual programs of study that required six to eight years.

In addition, the teachers had to be very careful in the selection of teaching materials and in the expression of their ideas. Most students were members of the Bolshevik party, which had already taught them revolutionary vigilance and their duty of recognizing and reporting to the authorities the names of those individuals who, according to their opinion, used subtle ways to introduce anti-communist sentiments and points of view.

Some of the students who had to attend tutoring sessions were very impatient and did not want to recognize their poor knowledge of the Russian language, or any other subject in which they needed tutoring. They argued with the teachers, and tried to justify themselves by accusing the teacher of nagging them and giving them a poor grade unjustly. They felt that being members of the Bolshevik party gave them the right to apply pressure on the teachers to promote them, regardless of their poor performance in the subject.

Khrushchev attended the tutoring sessions regularly. From the beginning I was able to establish a good rapport with him. He was modest and patient, and somewhat embarrassed by his inadequacy in elementary practical skills. It was apparent that he hadn't had much practice lately with pencils, pens, notebooks, and books. His rough fingers and a short, wide hand hindered his writing skills. He had to be shown how to hold the pencil the right way. At first, he had a hard time holding the pencil steady, it was slipping out of his fingers, but little by little, and with a lot of patience, he mastered the task. I had to do it in such a way that he would not perceive that I was showing him an elementary task, but rather was teaching him a more efficient way of performing,

which he accepted as a practical suggestion.

Nikita Khrushchev was very patient and serious about completing his homework, but at the same time, he was puzzled and expressed his skepticism about the need for some exercises. I remember that one time he asked me, "Is it so very important to be able to write letters neatly?"

"Yes, very important," I explained. "In the first place, this shows that a person is literate, and, in the second place, remember that in any work, the master is appreciated by the quality of his work." At such remarks, he only nodded in a sign of his agreement.

Grammar was hard for him to learn. He had difficulty with declinations of nouns and with finding subject and predicate in the sentences. When he was having a hard time solving these tasks, his face would suddenly become hot red; he would remove his cap and wipe his sweaty forehead. But, like a child, he truly enjoyed every small success in learning the new tasks. I still remember well his smiling, happy face when he was able to find the correct ending for a noun, or to construct a logical sentence.

Seeing my sincere desire to help him learn and knowing that he depended on my knowledge of the language to improve himself, he treated me with respect and allowed me to guide him. He was ready to compromise when he could grasp the reason for mastering some of the grammatical rules. Then he yielded to the necessary requirements and used to say with amazement, "Well, well, what kind of intricate thing this grammar is!"

For spelling practice, I used to ask my students to write from my dictation or to re-tell in writing some of the short stories that they had read. Spelling was one of the hardest tasks for Nikita Khrushchev, even when he was already in his second year at the Rabfak.

The Russian language program included readings from the masters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Russian literature from a newly printed reading book that contained passages from works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Gogol, Turgenev, and others. The works of these writers reflected the feudal period of Russian history. However, the reading materials were carefully selected and politically oriented to emphasize the injustices that existed in the past—the hard and oppressed situation of the peasants, the yoke of serfdom, and the revolts by the serfs, all the events that were addressed and corrected by the Agrarian Reform of 1861.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the shorter novels were assigned to the students to read by themselves outside of class, and then they were discussed during the lessons. They had to learn some of the verses by heart and recite from memory. What I wanted most was to show my students the beauty of the Russian language found in the samples of Russian classical writers, and to instill in them enthusiasm for reading. I would like to believe that Nikita Khrushchev never forgot the verse "To Chadayev," and the passages from the verse "The Village" by Pushkin.

Nikita Khrushchev enjoyed the reading lessons. He was very attentive in following the plot of the stories and quickly sided himself either with one of the characters, or with one group of people, and felt strongly against some of the others. This was so obvious when he actively participated in the discussions that followed afterward.

He was very sensitive and took to heart the events from the long gone past. He considered the landlords, capitalists, and bourgeoisie as one single concept—the rich

people. He believed that they were the cause of all social injustice as distinguished from poor or working people—with whom he identified himself—who had to endure hardships and oppression. He used to attack those characters in the story whom he considered to be unjust to the poor and to sympathize with those who had to bear the burden of poverty or injustice.

He liked to talk and sometimes it seemed as if he finally had the chance to express his opinion after long years of silence imposed on him by something or by somebody. Listening to his lengthy statements I was wondering where and when he had learned some of those cumbersome words in his vocabulary and if he comprehended their full meaning. Then I remembered all those endless meetings held during the revolution.<sup>6</sup> These meetings, in one form or another, were still going on very intensively every where. They were used as a tool for indoctrination with the communist principles and ideas. And everything became clear—for many of my students and for Nikita Khrushchev the revolutionary meetings had been their first real school and the Bolshevik speakers had been their first teachers. It was from them that he learned the tricks of revolutionary speech, with its confusing verbosity mixed with standardized slogans that were for him a real detriment to logical expression. And, because he often was short of words to convey his message, he compensated for this by using energetic gestures to express himself.

Another factor, that also greatly interfered with his ability to master the correct written and spoken Russian, was his assimilation of the speech patterns used by miners and the characteristic language of the Donbass region, which was a mixture of southern Russian and southeastern Ukrainian folk dialects.

However, this influence of ordinary folk speech was also one of the enriching sources in his repertoire, of ever-ready references for all occasions in the form of time honored popular proverbs and sayings.

I remember one particular episode, which happened during the time when we were reading and discussing the novel "Captain's Daughter" by Pushkin, and the impression the hero of the story, Yemelyan Pugachev, made on Nikita Khrushchev. This novel presents a vivid picture of the spontaneous peasants' revolt in the Urals<sup>7</sup> in 1773. The story tells of a fugitive *Donskoy* Cossack,<sup>8</sup> Yemelyan Pugachev, who suddenly appears in the Urals. Clever and daring by nature, he used the discontent of the Urals Cossacks with the local authorities and in a clever move becomes the leader of the revolt. He proclaimed himself to be the Czar Peter the Third and leads the Cossacks, peasants, and the poor members of the population to conquer one fortress after another. Nikita Khrushchev's comment showed his admiration for the hero, "He was a cunning *muzhik*, wasn't he? And how quick-witted he was in his moves! He outsmarted them all!"

At that time his reaction impressed me, but I did not attach a great deal of importance to his words and why he was taking it so passionately. But contemplating now with hindsight, I believe that Nikita Khrushchev was fascinated with Pugachev's courage and boldness, and probably this illiterate but daring Cossack had become one of his favorite heroes who inspired him in his search for power. And as peculiar as it may appear, Khrushchev's speech patterns had some similarities with those of Pugachev, including a prolific use of folk proverbs and sayings.

1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Nikita Khrushchev student Rabfaka," [in Russian] *Nikita Khrushchev v moych vospominaniyach* [Nikita Khrushchev in My Memoirs] MS, TS, (Manchester, CT, 1967), trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro
2. Comrade.
3. Name derived from the father's first name, used in Russia and some other Slavic countries.
4. One of the leaders of the Bolshevik faction.
5. See the chapter "The Origins of the Berezhnoy Family."
6. See the chapter "In Whose Name?"
7. The region of the Ural Mountains that starting from the North Sea in a southerly direction divides Russia into two parts, belonging to the European and the Asiatic continents.
8. Cossack from the Don region, located along the river Don.

## Khrushchev As A Political Figure At Rabfak

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

It was New Year's Eve of 1923 by the old style calendar, which was still used by the people to commemorate old holidays. I felt that the time was near for my baby to be born. Orest and my sister Tanya found a coachman with a sleigh and took me to a hospital. The hospital was so crowded that they put me on a bed in a long hall and I waited there the whole night.<sup>1</sup>

In the early hours of the morning, on the fourteenth of January by the new calendar, or on the first of January by the old calendar, I had my New Year's daughter. I named her Olga, like my beloved sister whom I lost recently in that town.<sup>2</sup> For a few months Orest's sister Vera came to stay with us and helped me with my newborn daughter. Our apartment was almost directly across the street from the Rabfak and I nursed my daughter during the breaks between the classes. Later our neighbor's wife baby-sat for us.

Being a teacher at the Rabfak I hesitated to bring my daughter to the church for christening for fear it would jeopardize my employment. I was the breadwinner in the family—my husband was a student at the Miners Technical School—therefore, I was afraid to lose my teaching position and shared this feeling with my sister Tanya. One day when I was at school Tanya and Lyeva, without my knowledge, took my daughter to the church and baptized her, declaring themselves to be the godmother and the godfather. When my father received this news, he did let us know that he was happy that his granddaughter was baptized according to the Russian Orthodox tradition and would be protected by the Almighty.

The social and political activities of Khrushchev at the Rabfak became noticeable after one very unusual event for those times in the life of the students. One day in the spring of 1923 the students were not satisfied with some action of Principal Pugach. Probably it was in connection with the irregular payments of stipends that were happening very often. Nikita Khrushchev had taken the initiative in his hands and immediately gathered the students for a meeting at which he addressed them, reinforcing his words with menacing gesticulations.

He harshly criticized the unfair conduct of the principal and proposed to organize a mass demonstration to protest against this injustice to the students. He incited them to march to the Town's Communist Party Committee Headquarters and to demand a resolution of the problem. At this point, the meeting started to thin out. Many of the students were leaving the meeting because they were afraid of risking their free education if the protest should turn out to be unsuccessful.

By introducing such ideas, Khrushchev was showing his political naiveté. Already at that time, the Bolsheviks considered demonstrations of this kind unlawful. The Soviet power was supposed to have given happiness and justice to the working people, having liberated them from the capitalistic yoke and injustice. What kind of unhappiness or injustice could there be to protest now?

Not being aware that he was using the rights and methods of workers in capitalist countries, Khrushchev, with the red flag in his hands, was leading the demonstration. A small group of students followed him. Marching on First Lane, on its way to the Headquarters of Town's Communist Party Committee, the "mighty" demonstration lost a few followers who had stepped aside to the sidewalk. But this didn't stop the leader who proudly marched ahead of his followers. As it became known later, Khrushchev achieved his objective. But the most amazing thing of all was that after such a risky undertaking Khrushchev gained strong popularity among students.

At the Rabfak all called him simply Nikita. I could not tell exactly what kind of political position he held or what type of students political activities he was involved in after this happened. But it became obvious that he was occupied with something important and was often absent from classes; and I began to see him only occasionally, during my tutoring sessions.

I noticed that his appearance had also changed. Now, he was wearing a leather jacket and a cap. His smiling face had assumed a serious expression. His bearing became self-confident; he was walking now with his head up, his shoulders straight, and was giving a general impression of being a very busy man.

In the beginning of the 1924 school year, there were significant changes at the Rabfak. Professor Mukhachev, the rector of the Technical School and the Rabfak, did not return to his position that fall. Later it became known that he suddenly disappeared during the summer and the rumors were that he was a monarchist and a member of a monarchic organization called the Union of the Russian People.

In his place Nikolay Nikolayevich Rozhdestvensky was appointed. The new rector was of middle age, a tall and energetic man, who, notwithstanding being lame due to an injured leg, was very agile, swift, and active. Right away he issued an order to all teachers to show him their educational credentials and a statement of their principles in teaching their subject matter. He also began an intensive supervision of the teachers by making regular classroom observations, by maintaining a systematic control of their lesson plans, and by conducting frequent conversations with them.

After being used to the good-natured professor Mukhachev, the teachers considered him to be a bureaucrat and a careerist. But most important, he was a zealous Communist and a loyal member of the Bolshevik faction of the party.

Very soon the teachers felt uneasy under his supervision. At the same time, the atmosphere of distrust and revolutionary vigilance on the part of the Bolshevik party organization began to reign in our institution. Teachers and students, finding

themselves under constant control, were nervous from being on the alert all the time. Any imprudent step in their teaching, any inopportune word said inadvertently, could have led to dismissal from the institution or even to the very serious consequences of being arrested by the GPU.

I remember an incident that happened to me after the lesson in which I explained to my students the use of "neither - nor" as a negative with the verb. I took the following example from a well-known poem by Pushkin: "The bird of God knows neither worry, nor work..." This example played a very important role in my future teaching at the Rabfak. Shortly after the lesson was over, I was summoned to the rector's office for an inquiry about it.

As soon as I came in his office, Rozhdestvensky asked me, "Why have you used such a preposterous and unfortunate example in your lesson?" I looked at him shaking my head and made a gesture with my hands conveying that I didn't understand what he meant. "The bird of God!" he clarified impatiently.

"Nikolay Nikolayevich, you are insulting the name of the great Russian poet, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin," I answered with a voice defending my choice. "This example is taken from his poem 'The Bird of Passage.'"

"Yes, yes... but the bird is the 'bird of God'... this sounds like an old outlived notion!" He remarked, making a contemptuous grimace and shaking his head.

"The poetry of Pushkin was, is, and will always be everlasting." I insisted.

It was not difficult to conclude that one of my students had shown his revolutionary vigilance by reporting me immediately after the lesson was over. But which one of them?

Soon after this incident, the rumors about a forthcoming purge began to circulate at the Rabfak. The teachers were requested to submit their autobiographies. Comrade Byelostotsky, a chairman of the teachers' union, or as it was called at that time, The Regional Union Of School Workers, became a frequent visitor to the teachers' room. The teachers felt that he was there spying on their conversations and refrained from friendly exchanges of opinions. The atmosphere became cold and restrained.

Meanwhile, my husband became a target of the not too subtle attention of the political vigilance at the Miners Technical School after one of the required lessons in military training. One day during practice in the use of guns, his instructor noticed that while the other students were confused about how to lie on the ground and how to hold a gun, Orest did everything right. He became suspicious and began to ask him where he learned to use a gun, what was his background, where he came from... That did it! Orest came home that evening and said, "It's time to go!"

He didn't wait for an official inquiry and dropped out of the Technical School under the excuse that after the birth of the baby he needed to start working to supplement his wife's income. While he applied and was waiting for a full-time teaching position in some of the schools in the region, he found temporary employment in the office of *Oblnarobras*<sup>3</sup> as it was called the Regional Department Of Popular Education. Soon there was a vacancy for a teacher in an orphanage in the nearby town of Makeyevka. Orest decided to accept it and I remained at the Rabfak. Orest's sister Vera came to live with me for a while to help me with my baby daughter.

But Comrade Rozhdestvensky was thorough in his search for undesirable elements among the teachers. From the autobiography that I submitted he knew that

my hometown was Slavyansk. He inquired about my father's background and found out that my father was a *lishenets*.<sup>4</sup> My father's political "crimes" were being a former owner of two homes and having his own tailor shop where he allegedly "exploited" the master and the apprentices who worked for him.

After this, some of my classes were assigned to another teacher of Russian, Byelostotsky. I understood that I became a target of the vigilant Bolshevik party members and decided that the wisest thing was for me to look for a position in some other place. When my husband came to visit me on his day off, we agreed, "It's time to go!"

It was almost the end of the school year and I had submitted my resignation from the Rabfak. As I walked out of the office holding a certificate of my teaching record at the Rabfak, I encountered Nikita Khrushchev in the hall and told him that I had resigned. At parting I told him, "Good-bye, Comrade Khrushchev! Who knows, maybe someday we will see each other again."

"Why not? Only the mountains cannot move, but persons may always meet each other," he answered with a proverb, avoiding looking directly in my eyes.

I had the impression that he probably already knew the reason for my resignation.

In the summer of 1924 my husband and I found employment in the village of Nizhnaya Krynka and we moved there.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Khrushchev - poilitichesky dyeyatyel na Rabfake," [in Russian], *Nikita Khrushchev v moych vospominaniyach* [Nikita Khrushchev in My Memoirs] MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967), trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "The Tragic Refuge."

3. Oblastnoy Otdel Narodnogo Obrasovaniya.

4. A person deprived of the civil rights to vote in elections because of his/her undesirable political background.

5. See the chapter "The Village School."

## Tatyana Gavriylovna Berezhnaya

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

My sister Tanya<sup>1</sup> was born on the twelfth of January, 1884 in Slavyansk. Tanya was only one year older than I and two years older than our sister Nyusya. Although all three of us attended the same gymnasium, Tanya was more mature and she had her own age girlfriends who lived not far from us. Therefore she acted with Nyusya and me as a big sister and she didn't play with us.

Being an older daughter, she used to help our mother cook and she especially liked to bake all kinds of sweet breads, cookies, and cakes. She also helped our mother to look after the younger children. Tanya also learned very early all types of embroidery: she was particularly skillful in cross-stitch, white satin-stitch embroidery on blouses and

lingerie, and openwork embroidery on table and bed linen. While still in a gymnasium, Tanya began to prepare for herself a beautifully embroidered trousseau. One could say without reservation that she had all the skills that at that time were appreciated in a good housewife.

Beginning from childhood, in her youth and womanhood, Tanya was the prettiest girl in our family. She inherited many of our father's physical traits. She was tall, had long wavy dark brown hair, an oval face, slightly tanned smooth skin, large brown and smiling eyes outlined with neatly shaped eyebrows and long eyelashes. Her facial traits were so well proportioned that they could be called classical.

As she was growing up, Tanya blossomed into a beautiful young woman and in the last years of gymnasium she had many admirers and was very selective in allowing young men to court her. She had a very dear girlfriend, Marusya Sidorenko,<sup>2</sup> who was in the same class with her in the gymnasium and who lived a little bit farther up from our house on the other side of the street. In the evening the two of them used to walk with their admirers back and forth on the sidewalk of Kharkovsky Street. Although both of them were good students, they didn't have great ambition for a career, but began very early to plan for a good marriage.

When Tanya graduated from gymnasium, she found employment in the Kotlyarov's Printing House, not far from where we lived on the corner of Kharkovsky and Zheleznodorozhnaya streets. With the money she earned she was purchasing additional trousseau items and was helping me when I went to study in Petrograd. She also began to seriously select a future husband among her admirers.

One of her first admirers was a young local lawyer. I still remember that he had a blind brother whom he used to bring with him. While he was walking with Tanya on the sidewalk, his brother sat on the bench outside our house with Nyusya and me. But this admirer did not last long; he found another girl to marry, probably because her father was a rich merchant in town.

Then there was one of our father's customers, a timber merchant, a man much older than Tanya, who courted her for a while and wanted to marry her. I don't remember exactly what did happen to him, but he disappeared during the revolution.

Then one day, a brother came to visit Dasha Kulish, a young girl who attended gymnasium with us. Lyenya<sup>3</sup> Kulish rented a room in the second house from our father. Their father was a small landowner in the neighboring village. Lyenya, who was tall, blond and very good-looking, began to court Tanya. She fell in love with him and decided he was the one she would marry. In addition to being from a wealthy family, he was also madly in love with Tanya, and soon they became engaged to be married. As was customary, they had already exchanged wedding rings and he had entrusted to Tanya for safekeeping his ancestral wedding ring. Everything was set up for an early wedding.

All this happened at the time when the revolution and all its atrocities had come close to home. Incited by revolutionaries, the peasants in Lyenya's native village took the law in their own hands. Blinded by the prospect of taking the land from the landlord, a mob of muzhiks burst into Kulish's estate. They attacked and killed the old landowner, Lyenya's father. When Lyenya came to his father's defense, they brutally beat him, then dragged him to the river and drowned him.

This tragic episode ended Tanya's engagement. During a period of mourning for her fiancé she had time to rethink the priorities in her life. It was a time of traumatic

change in the whole system of the country and in the goals that the young women were planning for their future. As had many of her girlfriends, Tanya decided to prepare herself for a future career and put her marriage plans on hold. Her choice was to enroll in medical dentistry courses the next school year, and she continued to work in the printing house saving money for this purpose.

That summer, when I came home for vacation, I decided not to return to Petrograd, which was boiling with revolutionary movement. Tanya and I agreed to go together to the nearest big city, Kharkov, where we both could attend courses of our choice. I was to continue to attend special courses required for a teacher's certificate in French language; Tanya was to start her first year of medical courses in dentistry.<sup>4</sup>

When she graduated, she elected to have her internship in the town of Yuzovka, where at that time our father<sup>5</sup> was living with our youngest brother, Pyetya.

It was in Yuzovka that Tanya met a young Jewish man, Lyeva<sup>6</sup> Tatarsky, who intensively courted her and charmed her with his attention. Lyeva was able to win Tanya's heart and she was seriously considering him as a good prospect for marriage. His family background was good. His father was a doctor and lived in the town of Rostov-on-Don. His father's sister and a brother, Solomon Moissyeyevich Tatarsky, were living together in the town of Yuzovka. They were from a formerly wealthy Jewish family whose parents before the Revolution owned a mill that was taken from them by the Soviet government.

Before our father decided to return with small Pyetya to his hometown of Slavyansk, Lyeva asked him for Tanya's hand in marriage. Being a very devoted Christian, our father was not very happy to see his daughter marrying a Jew and he stated one condition for Lyeva. If he wanted to marry his daughter, he had to be baptized in the Christian Orthodox faith and the wedding had to be performed in an Orthodox church.

When I and my husband suddenly left Nikitovka<sup>7</sup> and arrived in the town of Yuzovka in 1922, my sister Tanya was in our father's native village of Nikolskoye making the preparations for Lyeva's baptism, to be followed by their church wedding. The village church was less conspicuous than the cemetery church in Slavyansk, which had not been closed yet by the Soviets.

Lyeva had a large apartment that he shared with several young men. But when Lyeva and Tanya returned to Yuzovka they moved to their own apartment. Right from the first months, Lyeva was spending more time in his old apartment in the company of his boyfriends than with his new bride. Tanya complained to me that she was not very happy about it, but she decided to give him some time to get used to being married. For a while it seemed that they were adjusting to each other.

When my daughter was born, it was Tanya and Lyeva who took her, without our knowledge, to the church and baptized her, registering themselves as godmother and godfather; they knew that I could lose my work at the Rabfak if I did this myself.

In the summer of 1924 my husband and I moved to the village of Nizhnyaya Krynka. Before our departure my sister Tanya told me that the relations between her and Lyeva were becoming more and more tense every day, especially after she found out that Lyeva's friendship with his male friends was of homosexual nature and she told him that she would leave him.

He began to lock her up in the apartment for the whole day until he returned from

work. Tanya became desperate and decided to run away from him to the only place she knew, Lyeve's aunt's and uncle's apartment. So, that winter, one evening she went to bed early. When she found a moment that he was not watching her, she sneaked out, barefoot and wearing only a nightgown, and began to run on the sidewalk covered with snow. Lyeve ran after her, caught her on the street, and brought her back.

The next day Tanya had a high fever and the doctor diagnosed it as pneumonia. It was a very long and painful illness and convalescence period. Since Lyeve had to work, he asked his aunt to stay with Tanya and to take care of her. His uncle, Solomon Moissyeyevich Tatarsky, was coming from work to Lyeve's apartment where his sister was preparing the meals for all of them. He was also helping his sister take care of Tanya. As Tanya began to improve, she was crying a lot and didn't want to eat and Solomon Moissyeyevich sat near her bed and tried to cheer her up.

All this time Lyeve continued to visit his boyfriends in the evenings, leaving Tanya in the company of his aunt and uncle. It was in one of those evenings that Tanya shared with them that she was very unhappy and desperate and told them about Lyeve's secret double life. She complained that for a long time Lyeve kept her locked up all day and night in the apartment, because she had told him that she would leave him.

Meanwhile, Solomon Moissyeyevich fell in love with beautiful Tatyana. One day when his sister was not in the room he promised Tanya that he would help her run away from Lyeve, but she had to have patience until he could arrange everything well.

Solomon Moissyeyevich Tatarsky worked in the Donetsk Regional *Zagotzerno*<sup>8</sup> office. Although he was a son of the mill owner, he was able to maintain this good employment because there were not many experts who had such good knowledge of all the characteristics of various types of grains. He was also appreciated by his superiors for his experience and the skills that he learned while working at his father's mill such as the right proportions in mixing different kinds of grains for milling to obtain good qualities of flour for bread.

Solomon Moissyeyevich was able to arrange to be transferred to another office of *Zagotzerno* in the town of Yasynovataya. After he got an apartment there he came back to Yuzovka, and during the hours when his nephew was at work, rescued Tanya.

Lyeve never even imagined that it was his uncle who helped his wife to escape. The first place that Lyeve went to look for her was in Slavyansk at her father's home. Not finding her there he enlisted Tanya's brother Ivan to search for her at all of the Berezhnoy's relatives. They went together to the village of Nikolskoye to search for her. Then Lyeve and Ivan came to the village of Nyzhnyaya Krynka to see if Tanya had come to hide in our home. They also visited her sister Nyusya in Kharkov hoping to find her there.

After several months Solomon Moissyeyevich confronted his nephew and told him that all this time Tanya was living with him, that they were in love, and that they expected a baby. He asked Lyeve to give her a divorce, so they could get married. When Lyeve began to object, his uncle presented him a choice, either to do it voluntarily, or Tanya would go to court and ask for a divorce on the grounds that he was a homosexual, which Lyeve was trying to hide. Lyeve chose to give up and Solomon and Tanya got married as soon as they received an official divorce document.

Solomon was several years older than Tanya and was not a very attractive man, but he had a very amiable personality and, most important, he adored Tanya. They had a

very happy marriage that was blessed by the birth on April 16, 1927 of their daughter Mariana, whom they called Murochka. After several years of living in Yasynovataya, Solomon Moissyeyevich was again transferred to work in the regional office of *Zagotzerno* in the town of Yuzovka, which by then had been renamed Stalino by the Soviets. Tanya was hired by the Town's Commissariat of Health as a dentist for the town's schools. She made regular visits to all the schools in town and performed dental check ups and dental repairs to children right on the school premises.

Lyeva consoled himself by marrying for the second time. And, as it became known in the Tatarsky family, he treated his new wife in the same manner as he had treated Tanya, locking her in the apartment and not allowing her to leave home, while he maintained his secret life with his homosexual boyfriends. This young woman was not as lucky as Tanya in finding help to escape from her husband and her end was tragic. One evening when Lyeva returned from work, he found that his wife had committed suicide by hanging herself on the wardrobe bar.

Tanya and *Solomonchik*, as we called him gently in the family, lived for a long time in the town of Stalino. Although Murochka was three years younger than my daughter Lyalya,<sup>9</sup> we have maintained a close relationship with Tanya to give them a chance to know each other better since they were the only girls in the Berezhnoy family. During the summer and winter school vacations they visited each other and spent several weeks either at our or Tanya's place.

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1. See the chapters "Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy," "The Golden Childhood," "The Tragic Refuge," "It's Time To Go!," and "Khrushchev as a Political Figure at Rabfak."

2. Maria Sergiyevna Sidorenko Litvinova.

3. Nickname for Leonid.

4. See the chapter "Students in Kharkov."

5. See the chapter "The Tragic Refuge."

6. Nickname of Lev.

7. See the chapter "It's Time To Go!"

8. *Zagotzerno* - acronym for *Zagotovka Zerna* - The Office of the State Procurement of Grain.

9. Nickname given to Olga Gladky from the first day when she was born.

## Uncle Pyetr Returns From Hiding

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In the late fall of 1922 my uncle Pyetr,<sup>1</sup> who escaped from CheKa in Feodosia,<sup>2</sup> went to visit his sister Marusya and her husband Nikandr at the Belyayevka station, which was closest to Kharkov, where he was hiding. He didn't find them there; however, the station janitor told him what had happened to his former stationmaster.<sup>3</sup> After hearing about the unfortunate incident that his brother-in-law had to endure, my uncle Pyetr hoped to find out from his brother Mikhail what was going on in Feodosia, if it was safe to return there to his family. So, he suddenly arrived in Nikitovka to visit my father,

who hadn't had any news from him for about two years.

My father told his brother, "On his way from Feodosia, before returning home, Orest stayed for a few months with our sister Marusya and her husband Nikandr in their new place in the village of Alexyeyevka, near the Likhachevo station." He told his brother about Nikandr's undeserved imprisonment by the CheKa and about the trouble he had to go through trying to get his job back. And, of course, about the problems in the new place where they now lived, that they didn't even have a door and had to climb in and out of the house through the window. After hearing this story my uncle commented, "It sounds very funny, but it's really not a laughing matter! Only to think about all the humiliation that he and his family went through makes you wonder about this new government. It couldn't have happened during the good old days in Russia."

Uncle Pyetr had already heard in Kharkov that there was a new policy dispatched from Moscow regarding the specialists on the railroads and in other industries. Bolsheviks finally realized that their policy of eliminating the "enemies of the people" had gone too far. The Central Communist Party Committee had issued an order to stop the overzealous GPU<sup>4</sup> agents who, like their predecessors of CheKa, were continuing the persecution of railroad stationmasters and other specialists. And those whom they had not grabbed yet were so threatened they didn't wait their turn to finish in the cellars of the secret political police; they ran away and stayed in hiding. The railroads remained without qualified personnel and the whole rail system was deteriorating so rapidly that it was on the brink of collapse. The changed policies from Moscow were being implemented to stop this purge and to rehire those returning to previous places of employment, either to their old jobs, or at the other stations where the old stationmasters and specialists did not return.

My father confirmed that at the Nikitovka station the railroad employees knew this new regulation, and many old specialists were accepted with open arms by the railway authorities and re-hired. Uncle Pyetr decided that it was safe to return home to Feodosia. He stayed with his brother only one day and they had plenty to talk about what happened to them during this short but tumultuous period.

The most important news was about their father's death. My father told him, "Orest alone represented the whole Gladky family at our father's funeral. But now we have to decide how we will take care of our mother." Pyetr promised that as soon as he settled in Feodosia he would take care of their mother and he even considered taking her there to live with him.

Then my father recounted to his brother what I told him about what happened to my uncle Pyetr's family after he escaped to Kharkov while I remained in Feodosia.<sup>5</sup> He listened with great anxiety as my father told him that the day after his departure the CheKa's agents searched his house, that I was arrested and CheKa questioned me about his whereabouts. But he was glad to hear that when I left Feodosia all in his family were alive, and although short of food were surviving by bartering all they could. This made him feel justified in leaving the town in a hurry as he did.

However, Uncle Pyetr's mood quickly changed when my father told him that only a few months ago, that summer, his son Boris stayed in Nikitovka in our home for about two months. And my father recounted in detail what had happened at that time, "One day, near the end of my shift at the telegraph, the assistant stationmaster called me, 'Mikhail Makarovich, some vagrant boy is asking for you. He is telling us that his name

is Boris Gladky and that he is your nephew, a son of your brother Pyetr. Would you please come and see him?"

My father looked at his brother expecting him to be surprised, and indeed he was. He continued, "Well, I came down to his office and found a boy that was dressed in old worn-out clothes and shoes, very dirty and smelling from not washing for a long time." He again looked at his brother and explained, "You know, Pyetr, I saw Boris only once when he was a small child and wouldn't recognize him now. So, I asked him to tell me all the family names, his father's, mother's and sister's, the town where they lived, where his father worked. And, indeed, everything he told me was correct. He even corrected me by telling me that his real mother was dead and that he had a stepmother and her name. Well, dear Pyetr, I knew that it was really your son."

"My God, what had happened to him?" exclaimed Pyetr.

My father continued, "I made him wait until my shift ended and brought him home, where I presented him to Vera and Igor as their cousin. Vera told him to remove all his clothes, prepared him a bath, ordered him to wash himself well, and gave him something clean to wear. Bathed and clean he looked much better. Only then did she admit him for supper. Vera washed and disinfected his clothes, which were infested with lice, and she repaired and ironed them."

My uncle was shaking his head in disbelief, "What did happen to him? Why did he run from home?"

Then my father recounted to his brother the very sad story which Boris told him, that soon after his father was gone and Orest departed home, they didn't have anything to eat. Then his small sister Ksenia died, and after that their stepmother had kicked out his sister Lida and him; they became homeless and lived on the streets of Feodosia. Then one day Boris accidentally got in the wrong freight car to sleep during the night and awoke on some unknown railroad station far from Feodosia. A gang of vagrant men befriended him and he traveled with them on the railroads across the country. When the gang happened to travel through Nikitovka, Boris remembered that he had his uncle here."

My father rested for a while and then continued, "Boris stayed in our home the whole summer. Well, he seemed to be happy and I told him that he could stay with us for as long as necessary, until we heard something from his father."

My uncle anxiously asked his brother, "Well, what happened after that?"

"Well, everything was all right until it came time for the schools to begin, and I told Boris that we should soon go and enroll him in the school. He didn't tell me anything, but I saw that he didn't like the idea too much. This conversation with him happened the day I received my monthly salary."

The next morning, I woke up and before breakfast asked Igor and Vera where Boris was. They didn't know and also wondered where he could go so early in the morning. After breakfast Vera asked me to give her money to buy the bread. I opened my desk drawer where I kept my money and found that the money had disappeared. All our money for the whole month was gone!"

"My dear brother!" Exclaimed Uncle Pyetr, "It seems impossible!"

"Yes, impossible, but true!" answered my father emphatically and added, "And that's not all. Boris had also grabbed my good boots, my autumn coat, and a few other winter items. That rascal!" My father felt like justifying himself and said, "You should

remember, my dearest brother that I invited Boris to stay with us as long as it was necessary; he didn't have to remain homeless anymore. But he did choose to return to his vagrant life."

His brother was completely mortified after hearing this story. He covered his eyes with the palms of his hands and shaking his head repeated, "God, my dear God, my dear God..."

"One more important bit of news that Boris told me," remembered my father. "He had returned once to Feodosia and found that Lida was married." My uncle couldn't believe that his small daughter *Lidochka* was married. He was grateful when my sister Vera found Lida's address, which she had kept after writing a letter to her from Boris.

This story made my uncle very upset, especially that we didn't know where Boris was now. Uncle Pyetr reflected aloud with a sorrowful voice, "What a terrible childhood my children have had! To think that I considered that my second wife could be an excellent mother for them! Who could have guess-ed at that time what an awful woman she really was..."

Then after a long pause he added, "But at the end, it is I who should be blamed for what happened to my children! I was in such a hurry to save my own skin and did not consider what could happen to my family..."

Uncle Pyetr departed the next day on the first train to Crimea.

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1. Also see the chapter "Lidka."

2. See the chapter "A Defeat in Crimea."

3. See the chapter "Nikandr Yakovlyevich Medvyedev."

4. GPU – acronym for *Gosudarstvennoye Politicheskoye Upravlyeniye* - Governmental Political Department (1922-1934), formerly CheKa (1917-1921)

5. See the chapter "Bolsheviks in Feodosia."

## Lidka

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

When my uncle, Pyetr Makarovich Gladky, returned to Feodosia,<sup>1</sup> he was rehired as a railroad stationmaster<sup>2</sup>. However, he couldn't find his wife. Somebody else was living in his house and didn't know anything about his family. Right away the railway administration gave him an apartment to live in and food coupons for bread and other products.

As soon as he could, Pyetr Makarovich went to see his daughter Lida at her cottage, located in the poorest part of the town. He could not imagine that his young daughter could be married because she was not yet fifteen years old; therefore, it was with trepidation that he waited for her to open the door.

"Who is there?" he heard her young voice.

"*Lidochka*,<sup>3</sup> it is your Papa."

The door opened and he saw his little Lida, a pale and skinny teenager, but with

the expression of a grownup on her face. Lida threw her arms around her father's neck and they hugged each other right in the middle of the open door, both crying and repeating kind words to each other.

"*Lidochka*, my dear little girl, *Lidochka*!" her father repeated.

"*Papochka*,<sup>4</sup> *Papochka*, I knew you would come back, *Papochka*," Lida said. Then her face illuminated, as she looked at her father and said, "They didn't arrest you. It was good that you escaped in time!"

The reunion was both tender and sorrowful because Lida recounted to her father in minute details all that had happened after he unexpectedly left home and she and her brother Boris remained with their stepmother and little half-sister Ksenia.

It seemed that when their stepmother remained without any support for the three children, she at first provided for food by bartering all of her husband's clothing. Men's clothing was very valuable in those days when many Whites were still flocking into town. They needed to find some decent clothes to change from their fisherman's and peasant's outfits, which they had exchanged for White uniforms in a hurry in the villages. But clothes were bartered very quickly. When famine engulfed the town, other household items were not valued much in bartering and disappeared very quickly.

Lida recounted to her father that one morning the CheKa agents came in their house with two longshoremen, whom they ordered to take all furniture from the living room. They pulled out the black shining grand piano and all upholstered furniture; the Oriental rug lying in the center of the room; her father's big desk, and a swivel chair, leaving all papers from the desk drawers scattered on the floor. Then the agents instructed the two men to take the huge bookshelf. They gestured to throw the books down from the shelves. The men obeyed the order and pushed down the whole collection of classic books. The books fell down on the wooden floor with a "Poa-o-ah!" "Pa-o-ah!" sounds like the complaining sighs of wounded living creatures—echoing in the empty room. When the men were gone, the children, who were observing from the hall this irreverent treatment of their father's prized possessions, rushed into the room and started to collect the books. Their stepmother ordered them to pileup the books in the corner of the empty room and she gathered all her husband's papers in a basket and put it on top of the book tower. The empty room looked strange and scary to the children.

Lida explained what happened next. Their father had not returned home and there had been no news from him. At their questions about the whereabouts of their father the stepmother just said, "He went up North... I don't know where he is... He needs to be away..."

And then there was the problem with the bread. For several months they lived on very small rations, until all that could be bartered was gone. For a while they did without. Then their little half-sister Ksenia got very sick and died for lack of medicine and food. The famine had taken its toll on the weakest member of the family.

Lida said that after their half-sister Ksenia died, their stepmother became angry, wicked, and malicious with her stepchildren. She told Lidia and Boris, "There is nothing left to eat... Get out on the streets and find it for yourself, like the other children do. I cannot help you anymore!"

*Lidochka* at that time was almost thirteen years old and Boris was almost ten. They walked out of their home onto Karantinnaya Street and went down to the town's

center. Lida, being older, felt responsible for her brother's safety and held his hand tightly. As they approached the market, she thought that maybe they could find some leftovers in the refuse. But everything was cleaned up; only a few birds were finding something in the dust.

On the streets people were moving slowly like shadows; some were skinny, with hollow cheeks and rapacious eyes; the others were all swollen with their skin ready to burst from edema induced by hunger. Here and there, Lida and Boris could see on the sidewalks, lying close to the walls and fences, curled up bodies of men and women who looked like they were dead or dying; some had eyes open wide and staring in one place; the others had covered their faces with their hands or clothing.

"Lida," asked Boris, "why are they lying on the streets? Don't they have a home?"

"I don't know *Boryk*,<sup>5</sup> maybe they are from out of town and don't have the money to buy tickets for the train."

Lida's story became more and more tragic as she described what happened to them that day and in the days thereafter. The whole first day sister and brother wondered on the streets. Young and inexperienced for such adventure and more hungry than in the morning, they returned to their home. But the house was locked and seemed to be empty. They went to the stepmother's brother's house, which was just across the courtyard, and found that it was empty and locked too. They didn't expect to be locked out of their house and to be left alone at night on the street. The houses of their neighbors were empty and had been locked up for a long time, as they had all moved to the country hoping to find food there.

It was becoming dark and they decided to get into the center of town where the streets were illuminated, and they went to the railroad station. There they found some children dressed in dirty and ragged clothing who were sleeping cuddled up next to each other. Hungry and tired, they sat near them and fell asleep warmed by the other small bodies.

The coolness of the early morning and hunger woke them up. With dirty hands they rubbed their eyes. Slowly the others in the group awakened too. They met their night companions. Some of the oldest girls, who were already experienced in survival skills, were in charge of the group. They told them that they could stay with them and that they would be called simply by the slang names of *yidka* and *Bor'ka*.

At first, they went regularly to their home to see if they could find there their stepmother. Or maybe... There was a gleam of hope that maybe their father might even return to look for them. They also looked in the house of their stepmother's brother, but they always found both houses locked and empty.

Lidia even found a piece of wrap paper at the market, borrowed a pencil from somebody and wrote a short message, which she put under the entrance door. The message was very simple: "Our dear stepmother and father, when you return look for us in the port or the rail station. Ask homeless children, they would show you where we are. Lidia and Boris."

Then one day they found somebody living in their home, and the woman chased them away assuming they were the beggars, "Go away, we don't have anything to eat ourselves." After that they did not visit their home anymore.

They survived through the whole summer staying with the group of homeless children. Among them Lidka found young girlfriends and later she found some older

guardians who knew how to survive. They brightened her days by listening to her young pain and bestowed on her their almost motherly kindness. They had already seen life and understood everything better than the inexperienced Lidka. They knew where to look for refuse, where something edible could be found; they taught her how to steal a potato or a handful of other foodstuff in the market, and how to recognize some edible plants growing along the abandoned railroad tracks. They taught her how to find a place to sleep at night, which was not so difficult in the summer in the Crimean seashore town. Sometimes they slept under the old fisherman's boat or on the abandoned barge, but more likely under the tables at the market. But in bad weather they went far on the unused railroad tracks and slept in an old abandoned freight car.

The fall was nearing, and Lidka's dirty and ragged clothes were not keeping her skinny body warm. In the fall the older girls introduced her to other means of survival in the company of men, mostly the longshoremen, who could steal in the port and were generous with food and drinks. She learned quickly to drink *samogon*,<sup>1</sup> that warmed her up in the cold weather and changed her gloomy mood to become cheerful and lighthearted. It didn't take long to get used to what made the men happy and to feel free in their company. It helped her to rely less on stealing, which was becoming harder and harder during the famine. But, most important, she always saved some food to bring to her younger brother.

Many times Lidka left Bor'ka by himself or with a group of other younger children somewhere to wait for her while she was going in search of food alone—it was easier without him hindering her moves. Bor'ka didn't like to be left alone, especially when he had to spend the night without his sister.

One gloomy and cold autumn day Bor'ka was sitting in the harbor. With hungry eyes he observed the longshoremen as they were loading the ship with wheat grain. In the evening he went to the old outrigger where he usually met Lidka in the evening. He didn't have to wait long. Lidka came before dark with a bundle of old rags. As she greeted him, he smelled *samogon*<sup>6</sup> from her breath.

"*Boryechka*,"<sup>7</sup> she called him with his pet name, "I brought you something to eat." She began to fuss around her brother and hurriedly disentangled dirty rags where she was hiding a piece of bread. "Look, *Boryechka*, it's real bread..." Bor'ka grabbed the piece of bread and started to swallow it with avidity, trying not to drop even one crumb of it.

Bor'ka was trembling from the cold and wet wind blowing from the sea and began to cry quietly. Once in a while he would whine, "Lidka, it's cold... Do you feel how the wind blows?... Where are we going to sleep tonight?"

"Eat, *Boryechka*, eat my little one, then I will put you to sleep and will warm you up."

Lidka was bustling near him preparing a sleeping nest on the bottom of the old outrigger with the bundle of rugs. "Don't you worry, *Boryechka*," she told him in a grown-up manner, "everything will be all right. You eat first, then say your prayers to God, and then lie here in your small bed... I will tell you a fairy tale... Tonight you will be warm, I will warm you up."

"I want to go home, Lidka," whined Bor'ka.

"Well, my dear *Boryechka*, tonight we will sleep here, and tomorrow we will go home. All right?" she was consoling him.

"Where is our papa now?" asked Bor'ka, settling himself on the pile of rags.

"Papa had to go up North, my little one. He needed to do that. Stop crying, remember that you are a man, and men do not cry," explained Lidka.

"Why did he have to go up North?" insisted Bor'ka.

"You see, I think that here they were looking for him to arrest him... Only you should remember not to tell this to anybody!" she warned him sternly.

"And why did they want to arrest him?"

"Well, *Boryechka*, probably because he was White. I heard someone saying that Bolsheviks are arresting all Whites... And sometimes they shoot them on the seashore... Or send them far away and they never return... You understand?" Explained Lidka.

But Bor'ka did not understand its meaning. He only figured out that indeed his father had to go away from here, where he could be arrested or maybe shot.

"Well, have you finished your supper?" asked Lidka and added, "Now pray to God and thank Him for it."

"I don't know how to pray... I forgot it."

"Let's do it together, I will prompt you." And Lida remembered as her own mother had taught her to pray. "First, stand on your knees, and hold your little hands in front of you like this... And repeat after me, 'Dear God, thank you for the bread... and water... that we were able to find today...'"

Boris was repeating after her, "Dear God..."

Lida continued, "Thank you for every-everything... And for keeping us alive... Save all of us, hungry children... And our papa... And stepmother... And all good people... Good night, God!"

Bor'ka was repeating after her, "...Good night, God!"

"Now cross yourself... Like that... And bow to the ground to God... Just like that. Now lie down. I will warm you up. You will feel good now. What kind of a fairy tale do you want to hear?" she asked him.

"Tell me the story about the hungry boy who was drifting alone on the waves of the sea and how the magic boat brought him to the Nourishing Island. And how the boy was eating and drinking for three days and three nights."

The children accommodated themselves at the bottom of the old outrigger. Lidka snuggled up close to Bor'ka's small body. The smell of *samogon* was bothering him and he buried his face in his sister's bony chest. Lidka pulled some old rags over them and tried to tuck them under her brother's body. When both of them disappeared under the rags, she began to tell her brother the fairy tale, which she remembered from her early childhood years, inventing portions that she forgot. Boris felt the warmth of his sister's body and, as he slowly warm-ed up, he fell asleep listening to her calm voice.

The next morning, Bor'ka remembered how he observed the ship and how the longshoremen were loading the wheat grain and asked his sister, "Lidka, why they are loading the wheat to send it abroad and don't give it to us here?"

"What are you talking about? What wheat?" asked Lidka. Bor'ka told her what he had seen in the harbor the day before.

"That's good, Bor'ka, this morning we will go collect the spilled grain from the port grounds."

"You think so?!" exclaimed Bor'ka. "They have so many guards there! Even the longshoremen were thoroughly searched when they were leaving from work!"

"Well, *Boryechka*, I will go by myself and you will wait for me," reassured his sister.

But Bor'ka protested, "I am afraid, Lidka, they could kill you!"

"But, dear *Boryechka*, I am a woman... And for a woman it's easier... Because you know, all muzhiks are alike..." Lidka tried to explain to him. Bor'ka didn't understand anything from her explanation, but it calmed him down. He believed that his sister was smarter than he was because she was older and she had attended school for several years and knew how to read and write; he had attended the school for only one year before the civil war started and then the schools had closed.

When Lidka came to the port that morning, there were many homeless children making their way in the port to collect the precious wheat grains on the ground. The guards were not able to cope with the large number of children, who, like locusts, were climbing through all the holes of the fenced port. Neither the shouting nor shooting in the air was able to stop their invasion. Only when the Red Army soldiers arrived, called in on emergency by the Soviet export authorities, were they able to contain and force the retreat of children. In the eyes of the fat export agents "the children's mob" threatened to delay the scheduled shipment of the grain abroad. That grain was an exchange for the foreign equipment badly needed for Soviet industry. But the young and hungry "criminals" were happy and well fed for several days by the grain collected on the port ground.

One cold autumn day, the rain drizzled without interruption. On such days it was difficult to find something to eat. But Bor'ka was lucky. He spent the day close to the rail station and came to the platform when the passenger trains were stopping. One passenger, getting out of the train, gave him a small package. In it were a remnant of a piece of bread and a piece of salami. It was a rarity to even see it. Boris avidly started to eat, but right away remembered Lidka and divided it into two parts and wrapped up her half, while swallowing up his part in no time. All day he had been trying to find his sister in the places where they usually met. The evening was nearing and he could not find her. His hunger didn't allow Bor'ka to get the food he had out of his mind, but he stubbornly held the wet package under his arm hoping to find his sister.

It was almost dark and the cold of the nearing night was getting under his ragged clothing. The drizzling rain pierced the air and penetrated the damp rags. Boris knew that on such nights they could not sleep in the outrigger, but usually slept in the freight car. It was dark when he reached what he thought were the abandoned rails and he climbed into one of the open freight cars. He curled up in the corner squeezing the wet package with the sister's half of the food and fell sound asleep. He didn't hear that the train which the car was attached to brought him far away from his hometown...

Lidka searched for several weeks for her brother and, not knowing what happened to him, cried for a while, especially when she was drunk, and complained to her girlfriends that she was now alone in the whole world.

Before winter arrived, Lidka and her girlfriends found an old abandoned cottage; it was full of holes but to them it looked fit for human habitation, and they settled down there to wait till the winter was over. It was a damp and dirty place with a few small windows and dark, like a wild beast's den, but it did protect the homeless children from the rain and cold wind. Slowly it was filled up with their belongings—all kinds of ragged clothing, old blankets, cans, bottles, and some food, stolen or earned by the girls for

their favors with men.

Every girl had her own place, where she kept her personal items, and nobody infringed on the other's property even if it was a piece of bread hidden for a rainy day. It seems very strange, but this unbearable misfortune in which these homeless girls found themselves never provoked any discord among them about the most important thing, food. And if one of them came in the evening hungry, all of them tried eagerly to share their meager supper with her.

Their male guests, whom they had met before in the dark corners of the town, were now coming in the girls' home. Many of their guests were homeless older boys, or men, but some were adult longshoremen from the port. All of them paid their lover-girls either with a piece of bread, or other food, or with the large inflated money bills. The wine and *samogon*, which their guests brought, warmed their small shivering bodies and put them in a cheerful mood, which sometimes became exuberant. It was not rare that some lovers would beat their girls. Then the darkness of the den would resound with crying, sorrowful moans, and complaints of a young voice hoarse from alcohol and cold. It was dreadful the life of these young beings, who were not women yet, but who had grown up very fast in the battle for survival.

After many days of thick darkness in Lidka's gloomy life, a ray of light came out and brought her some happiness. In this poor and ugly cottage she encountered a man, a waggoner from the port, who with his caresses and kind words awakened in her a feeling of love. She believed in his affection and gave him her young life unconditionally by leaving her girlfriends and going to live with him. It happened when she was not yet fifteen years old that she left her childhood behind somewhere in the fog; and adulthood had not yet arrived.

The waggoner, who took her in his home at first as a lover and housekeeper, grew fond of her and liked her so much that he registered with her legally as husband and wife. He was much older than he appeared to be and was a coarse man who liked to drink. When he was drunk he would sometimes beat Lidka for no reason at all. But those occasions when he was nice to her warmed her poor little heart; she had yearned for human affection and kindness, and she repaid him with her devotion and early feelings of an awakening womanhood.

Lidka left behind the days of misery and hunger, of the constant search for food, and nights in the dirty cold cottage with the men guests, *samogon*, and violence. But the new days were not without sorrow. Drinking and beating were not completely gone from her life, but now they were from a man who called her his wife. Now she lived in a house that she could call her home, which was clean and warm. Now there was a man whom she could give all of what was left of her young and crippled life.

That's what Lida conveyed to her father in their long and emotional reunion. She told him also that once, when her brother returned to Feodosia and came to see her, her husband had not allow her to keep him in their home, and Boris left with the gang of vagrant companions. One consolation was that she gave Boris her address and he promised to write to her. And she showed her father a letter she received from Boris written by her cousin Vera when he was visiting Uncle Misha in Nikitovka.

When Lida finished telling her story to her father, she said, "Now, *Papochka*, you are here and we are all alive, except for little Ksenia. Boris will come home again, he promised me that! Our days of sorrow and fear are behind us."

Her father wondered, "*Lidochka*, my dear girl, how have you grown up in such a short time? Instead of me consoling you, it is you who are consoling me. Yes, let us be happy about finding each other!"

Lida offered her father some bread and a piece of lard to eat. He stayed with her the whole morning until it was time for him to go for his shift at the railroad station.

Lida told her father, "Papa, I don't want my husband to find out, at least not right away, that you have returned to town." And she explained, "I am afraid that he would expect too many favors from you, as a stationmaster." But she reassured him, "He is a good man, Papochka, but life now is so hard for everybody. And he might think that you are rich, or that you can find him a better job. With time, I will prepare him for the news."

Pyetr Makarovich observed that his small Lida was telling him this not like a young and innocent teenager, but as a mature woman experienced in the nature of men. And he praised Lida for her wisdom, "My dear girl, you are reasoning better than me, a grown-up man."

Lida instructed her father further, "You may come and visit me sometimes in the morning, when my husband is at work." Then she assured her father that he should not worry about her, "My husband is much older than me, Papa. He works as a waggoner at the port and has a way of getting some food there, so we always have bread on the table. If you need something, tell me, I could save you some bread or other things he brings home."

Pyetr Makarovich left his daughter's home reassured that she didn't need his help at this time.

Through some of his railroad workers, Pyetr Makarovich found out that his wife lived in a nearby village with her brother and her niece. He went to the village without notifying his wife that he was coming. He decided that he would not tell her anything about finding Lida, nor what his daughter had told him about what had happened to them. He wanted to hear the story from his wife's lips and her explanation of the events.

His wife was indeed very surprised to see her husband in the village, and she started to cry right away and to tell him that their daughter Ksenia died from a childhood illness during the famine in 1921. Then, with the expression of a martyr on her face, she hurled reproaches at her stepchildren. She complained that after all family possessions were bartered for food, Lida and Boris started to look for bread with the gangs of hungry children on the streets in Feodosia. She said they did quite well in feeding themselves, but they were not returning home where she, their poor stepmother, had nothing to eat.

She told her husband that she desperately searched for them on the streets. When she finally found them, she told them to return home and then they all would go to live in the village with her brother and his daughter. "But," she said, "the children laughed in my face and told me that I was not their mother and that they didn't need me any more." And she pathetically added, "Oh! How I cried and begged them to come with me, but they just teased me with the food pulled out of their pockets! And do you know what Lida answered me? 'You want to take our bread away from us! You are hungry and we are not! Why should we return to live with you? You didn't feed us before, how would you feed us now?' Did you hear what she told me? And this was what I had in return for all my sacrifices for them! Only to hear that I am not their mother!"

And his wife burst into loud crying and through her tears reproached her husband, "And you! You abandoned me with *y-y-ou-ou-r* children... Without any means to live on.

Almost two years! Not even one word from you. How could I provide for y-y-o-ou-r children? People were starving on the streets, my own daughter died from starvation. Maybe if I had had something to give her to eat, she would have survived... Tell me, what I could have done?... What I could have done?"

Pyetr Makarovich listened to his wife's story without interrupting her. He felt guilty about abandoning her and his children. He felt that he had an obligation to make up to them for his negligence. He needed time to sort out who was telling the truth, his wife or Lida. His wife put a tiny seed of doubt in his mind. It was most hurtful for him to find out that Lidia's version of why they became homeless was completely different from the one his wife told him.

In his mind the words of his beloved daughter *Lidochka* resounded, "Our stepmother told us to go out on the streets and to provide for ourselves as the other children did... We became homeless because when we returned home that evening and many days thereafter we found the door locked, and our stepmother disappeared without telling us where she was going."

"No", was flashing through his mind, "my little Lida could never lie to me. And Boris, he also told his uncle in Nikitovka 'Our stepmother kicked us out of the house...'" And he concluded, "Children must be telling the truth..". But he felt that he was also to blame for what happened.

He told his wife to collect her belongings and their remaining furniture that she took with her to the village. They hired a peasant to transport it, loaded all on a wagon, and returned to live together in Feodosia in the apartment given to him by the railway administration.

When Pyetr Makarovich told his wife that he had found Lida and that she was married and living right here in town, his wife played the role of a wronged woman who was offended by his children. She had an outburst of rage, screaming that she didn't want to see Lida in their house and furthermore absolutely prohibited him to see his daughter. He understood that the woman he had married because he hoped that she would be a good mother for his children had not only betrayed his expectations, but also was now standing as an obstacle between him and his children.

He told Lida about her stepmother's outburst and she was very afraid that her stepmother would find out about her father seeing her. She didn't want to see her father being tortured for this by his wife. And she didn't want yet to let her husband meet her father. But most of all she was afraid to tell him that her stepmother prohibited her to put her foot in her father's house. She knew that her husband, who was the boss in his own home, would not understand the submission of her father to his wife. She and her father could not see each other in her house either because if her husband found out that a man was coming to see her in his absence, he would give her a good beating! For all of these reasons poor Lida and Pyetr Makarovich had to see each other secretly in the small streets of the town, where nobody could see them and inadvertently tell her stepmother or her husband.

Having settled the situation and relationships with his wife and daughter, Pyetr Makarovich had now to solve the problem of what to do with his own mother. If he had to take her in his home, he would aggravate his relations with his wife. But when his wife heard that the cottage of her mother-in-law would be sold, she agreed to take her to live with them. However, from the first days of living together, it became clear that

the two women could not stay under one roof.

One problem was that his wife was eager to snatch the money from the sale of the cottage from her mother-in-law. She prompted poor Pyetr Makarovich to make his mother pay for her upkeep, reasoning that the money was becoming worthless every day with inflation, a reasoning that Pyetr Makarovich considered correct; but his mother was not yielding claiming that her son had to provide for her.

The second problem was that his mother, who all her life had commanded her husband and her sons, wanted also to command in her son's home. But her daughter-in-law, who had the same character as the old woman, or even worse, did not intend to have her mother-in-law boss her around.

The situation became so bad that Pyetr Makarovich had to get in touch with his brother Mikhail and ask him to take his mother to Nikitovka to stay with him. My father sent me to Feodosia to bring my grandmother to Nikitovka.

But the old woman couldn't get along with her granddaughter Vera either because here she also wanted to be the mistress of the house. But Vera, who had been managing the house for several years, couldn't stand grandmother's bossing her around and telling her what to do. Fights between the grandmother and granddaughter were so intense and kept everybody nervous that my father got in touch with his sister Marusya, who, knowing well how shrewish her mother was, reluctantly agreed to take her to live with her in the village of Alekseyevka. Her mother lived with her until she was very old; longevity ran in her family.

And now, what had happened to Lida's younger brother Boris, or as he was now called Bor'ka, who fell asleep in the freight car and was awakened in the strange railroad station? Boris told me his story in 1928 when I was in Rostov-on-Don taking the exams for correspondence courses I was enrolled in. My sister Anya gave me his address and I saw him several times.

Boris told me that he had traveled for a couple of years in the empty freight cars across the vast extensions of the new Soviet Union. He was adopted by a gang of vagrant men from whom he learned how to smoke, drink *samogon*, and play cards and to swear. From them he learned how to survive by stealing, cheating, and swindling.

He said that in the beginning he missed his sister Lidka and cried a lot at night cuddled up somewhere in the corner of the freight car. But he did not know how to return home from the railroad stations with very strange sounding names where the erratic travel of the gang took him. It was much safer for him to stay with the vagrant gang where he always had something to eat and was looked after by his protectors who in their peculiar way showed him their affection and caring, which he needed sometimes more than food or shelter.

The gang did not stay very long in one place for fear of being caught for stealing. But the men favored the large railroad stations with many abandoned tracks and freight cars where they could have shelter from the rain and cold weather and a place to sleep at night. There they also could find a constant traffic of many trains with a steady flow of the passengers from whom they could easily steal pocketbooks, wallets, and luggage.

In fact Bor'ka became a very skillful petty thief and knew how to sneak between the passengers and quietly, without being felt or detected by his victims, to remove their money or wallets and slip away without being noticed. Then he would pass the catch to the standing nearby beggar who was one member of the gang.

By that time Bor'ka was so involved in the communal life of the gang that he only occasionally remembered his home, Lidka, and his father. Then one winter day the gang decided to move to the warm climate and Bor'ka found himself in Crimea again and remembered that Feodosia was his hometown. He longed to see his sister and maybe to find his father, and he convinced his companions to visit the port town to try their luck there.

It took him a couple of days of wandering from place to place in the port, railroad station, and in town looking for the gangs of homeless boys and girls and asking if anybody knew where to find his sister Lidka. Finally, he found one gang that showed him where she lived. It was an emotional reunion, but Lidka's husband was not disposed to add another mouth to feed and she had no other choice but to let Bor'ka return to his vagrant gang. She wrote down her address for him and he promised her to keep in touch by mailing a postcard from time to time, and he promised to visit her the next time the gang will be in Crimea.

Then one day the gang arrived with the freight train at the station of Nikitovka. Bor'ka told his companions that he wanted to see if he could stay with his uncle Misha for a few months, if he would keep him, which his uncle did. After a few days in Nikitovka the gang decided to move south to the station of Rostov-on-Don. Boris promised them that if he didn't like staying with his uncle, he would join them there. And they agreed that in case he stayed here, they would look for him in Nikitovka when they returned north.

Boris told me that he liked staying with his uncle and his cousins Vera and Igor, although he felt that Vera was too strict with him and was always annoying him by telling him to wash himself, to take a bath, and change his clothes. And being used to the vagrant life, he felt restless and missed his gang companions. He asked Vera to write a postcard to his sister Lida and even got an answer from her there. He stayed the whole summer with his uncle Misha.

Then his uncle told him that in the fall he should go to school. Boris didn't like the idea of going to school and decided that it was the time to join his gang in Rostov-on-Don. Of course, he needed some money and boots for the coming winter, and a few other things. Without being ashamed or remorseful, Boris told me that he waited until his uncle Misha received his monthly salary and in the evening sneaked into his room and took the money. The next morning he got up very early; on his way out of the house he grabbed the boots and other things he prepared ahead of time, and boarded the first freight train going south.

At the station of Rostov-on-Don, the militiamen were over the tracks catching the free-riders, and they arrested many vagrants including Boris. After checking their documents, the men were not put in prison—they were not considered to be "the enemies of the people" or political enemies of the Bolsheviks—they were put in the freight cars on various trains and were told not to return to this station anymore because if they did, then they would be arrested and thrown in prison.

But Boris, because he was under age and had no documents at all, was placed in the town's orphanage. There he finally received some formal schooling, learned how to read and write, and attended some vocational trade classes. He wrote several letters to his sister Lida and found out that his father had returned home, but Lida warned him that their stepmother would not let him live with them. She suggested that it was better

for him to stay in the orphanage until they would keep him there.

At the age of sixteen Boris was placed to do odd jobs at the local movie theater in Rostov-on-Don. There he learned from the old projectionist his work and in time became a film projectionist himself. When I visited him, he was planning to visit his father and sister in Feodosia. When by my father's request I went to Feodosia to bring my grandmother from my uncle Pyetr's home to Nikitovka, I also visited my cousin Lida. She told me the same story that she told her father about what had happened to her and her brother Boris.

I could not recognize Lida; she had changed so much in less than two years. It is with profound sadness and pain that I remember now that young and lively girl *Lidochka* and her younger brother Boris, whose lives should have been flown on a completely different course. But they were steered to an unexpected and tragic path and were crippled and distorted, as were many millions of other young and fragile lives at that trying time in Russia.

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1. Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.] "Lidka," *Vo ymya chego?* [in Russian] MS, TS, 1952, 50-52. Previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.] "Lidka," [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia* no.5058 (New York: Rossia Publishing, February 18, 1953) Additions as recounted by the author, trans. and edited by Olga Gladky Verro, 1994,.Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro

2. See the chapters "Defeat in Feodosia" and "Uncle Pyetr Returns From Hiding."

3. Affectionate and diminutive of Lidia.

4. Affectionate and diminutive of Papa.

5. Diminutive of Boris.

6. Home brew.

7. Affectionate of name Boris.

## **Part Five**

# **Political Inquisition And Coerced Collectivization**



# Peasants' Plight

By Olga Gladky Verro

The organization of the agricultural *artels*—as they were called in the beginning<sup>1</sup> before the Soviet authorities coined the infamous new name of *kolkhoz*<sup>2</sup>—was proceeding very slowly after the revolution because the peasants were resisting it. The revolutionary slogan promised “All land to the peasants!” and the peasants expected to keep the land for private farming. But this golden dream turned out to be short-lived.

Before the revolution peasants were cultivating the land given to the village community during the emancipation from serfdom in 1861. This land was divided into strips by *mir*<sup>3</sup> for each household in the village on patriarchal lines, which allowed the sons to inherit it. By 1918, some households with large families had subdivided their parcels among their sons, who ended up with very small parcels, barely sufficient for family subsistence.

To improve the cultivation methods and to increase the production of grain, from 1905 to 1907 the Russian government allowed the peasants to buy and sell both their strips and lots of land. To provide the legal procedures for this purpose the government had established land commissions in the provinces, which facilitated the small independent farmers selling the land distributed by *mir*. The peasants were encouraged to consolidate their strips and to buy land from those who were selling their parcels and moving to the cities and towns to work in the emerging industry. The peasants who had a knack for business bought much of this land and became well-to-do peasants who provided a steady and reliable supply of grain for the country.

By 1916, during the war with Germany, the Russian government had started bread rationing in the cities, towns, and hamlets. And in 1917, the Provisional Government had introduced the state monopoly on grain, whereby the peasants had to deliver to the government all their surplus of grain at the established price. Rapid devaluation of currency and shortage of goods available for the peasants to buy prompted the illegal but common practice by the farmers of protecting the fruits of their labor by hiding a portion of the grain from the authorities. Bartering as a basic form of exchange of foodstuff for consumer goods also was a widespread practice.

From 1917 to 1918, the land was expropriated from the landowners and was distributed by *mir* among all households in the village. Since each household might receive the strips of land in different locations, peasants were allowed to continue buying and selling their strips and parcels of land and maintain the practice of consolidation of land.

During the civil war that followed the revolution, the peasants were cultivating the land, which by then they considered their own by right; some they had inherited from their fathers; other they had received from the distribution of the former landowner's land. In addition, they were also able to buy land from other peasants. During that time they endured requisitioning of grain by the Reds, Whites, and Greens, who needed it to feed their armies and the population in the cities, towns, and hamlets held under their

control.

As the Bolsheviks started to establish their authority in the country and needed to feed the population, they outlawed private grain trading by the peasants, who had no other choice but to sell grain at the established price to the government. But the peasants resisted giving all their surplus grain to the state at the low prices and continued their practice of hiding portions of the grain and bartering it on the black market.

Peasants felt betrayed by the revolution and were resentful of the Bolshevik government. They lost the incentive to produce larger crops. The subsequent drop in sowing was combined with the drought in several large grain-producing regions, and this resulted in the 1921-22 great famine, both in urban areas and the countryside.

The government responded with remedial measures, first by requisitioning grain, the state taking from the farmers all the grain it could place its hands on, then introducing a tax-in-kind, which was a fixed quota owed by the peasants to the government. This practice allowed the peasants to again legally sell their marketable surplus, which had an immediate beneficial impact on the availability of grain on the market. This period corresponded to the introduction in 1921 of NEP,<sup>4</sup> that allowed a revival of private trade and small artisan industry as an extraordinary temporary measure to relieve the desperate economic situation throughout the country.

Relaxation of control by the state was short-lived. Rapid national industrialization required foreign machinery, which was to be purchased by the Soviet government with proceeds from the sale of grain abroad. Peasants resisted selling the grain to the government because the state-established price for the grain was extremely low, so grain procurement was lower than expected by the state planners.

The Bolshevik Party directed the government authorities to use various means to requisition the grain from the peasants. The name of *kulak* was coined to identify the prosperous farmers who were declared to be the “enemies of the people” and they lost their voting rights. Brigades of Bolshevik Party members composed of workers, soldiers, and sailors were sent to the villages to requisition by threats and by force the hoarded grain out of the *kulaks'* barns and other hiding places. If persuasion did not work, they used cunning and deception by splitting the villagers into two opposing groups and instigating the class war of the poor against the well-to-do peasants. The confrontation of the Bolshevik regime with the peasantry escalated into a harsh and relentless campaign against the prosperous farmers who owned and cultivated larger tracts of land. They stood as an eyesore for the Bolshevik's doctrine of collectivization.

This period coincided with the end of free trade NEP policies. The Soviet government was eager to take full control over the production of grain. Collectivization of agriculture had until that time proceeded too slowly on the so-called voluntary basis. Renewed emphasis was placed on enforcement of collectivization. Bolsheviks engaged in eliminating the private farming success by dispossessing the *kulaks* of their land and other property; this terrible process was termed *raskulchivaniye*, and it sent the majority of *kulaks* into the forced labor camps<sup>5</sup> in Siberia and other faraway places of the vast Soviet Union.

Special collectivization agents were sent to the villages and farmsteads to hold public meetings, during which the peasants were forced to pass sham resolutions of the so-called “unanimous” and “voluntary” organization of *kolkhoz*. Those sham

meetings were usually held in the school buildings. Since the meetings required the service of a literate person, it was a common practice that a teacher was called to serve as a secretary for the meeting.<sup>6</sup> In addition, as a literate person, he was required to read aloud to the hostile peasants the numerous pages of propaganda literature about the collectivization. Also, the teacher was expected to volunteer to act as the village agitator-propagandist, called by the name *agitprop*, whose function the Bolshevik Party greatly emphasized.

Yes, the teacher was expected to “voluntarily” campaign for the *kolkhoz*, and he was forced to do this with the same enthusiasm as the farmers who were forced to “voluntarily” enroll in them. A distorted concept of *dobrovolnost*, which meant volunteering, was used. During those times the people got used to applying the coined phrase “*dobrovolno po prinuzhdyeniyu*,” which meant “voluntarily by coercion,” when they were forced to do something against their will. It was a perverted concept that was applied in all situations where the Bolshevik Party or the Soviet government wanted to show that the people were doing things voluntarily when actually the actions were forced.

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1. The chapter draws some factual information such as names, places, and dates from Sheila Fitzpatrick *The Russian Revolution: 1917-1932*, 2nd ed (Bungay, Suffolk, Great Britain: Richard Clay/Chaucer Press, 1985. Oxford University Press).

2. *Kollektivnoye khozyaystvo* - collective farm.

3. Village community and its council.

4. *Novaya Ekonomicheskaya Politika* – New Economic Policy.

5. Called *gulags*.

6. Orest M. Gladky (R. Mychnevich, pseud.) “Na obshchem sobranii” [in Russian] journ. *Zhar Ptyza* [Firebird] (San Francisco: March 1955), trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Also, see the chapters “The Dispossessed,” “Meeting On the Farmstead,” and “The Village School.”

## Ukrainization Of Schools

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

The Soviet Union was administratively subdivided into geographical national Soviet Socialist Republics because the Communist regime needed to placate the nationalistic aspirations of the peoples of many nationalities who lived in different regions of the former Russia. Therefore, it cleverly introduced the new principle, the so-called “nationalization,” that was supposed to give the impression of national autonomy to each Soviet Republic. So, each republic received an order from Moscow to implement this “nationalization.” In practice it meant the legalization of the official use of the national language within the geographical national administrative borders of each Soviet Republic.

Although the official language of the Soviet Union remained Russian, as it was in Russia before the revolution, the official language in each of the Soviet republics was declared to be its national language. And all the official documents had to be written in

two parts, one in the national language of the republic, and the other in Russian. Therefore, the Ukrainian language became the official language of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

This change was also applied to the educational system, beginning the new trend of the “nationalization” of schools. Each Soviet republic had to have two types of schools, one type where all subjects were taught in the national language of the republic with the Russian language as the required subject, and the second type where all subjects were taught in Russian with the national language as the required subject. Parents had the choice of which type of school to send their children.

Therefore, in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic the implementation of this new educational system, called the “Ukrainization” of schools, began. The Popular Education Offices desperately searched for qualified teachers who could teach the Ukrainian language and other subjects in Ukrainian. At that time there were no teachers who had formal schooling and educational background that qualified them for either of the two positions, but otherwise qualified teachers with practical knowledge of the Ukrainian language were considered excellent candidates. It was especially, hard to find teachers who wanted to teach in the village schools.

When Tonya and I decided to leave Yuzovka,<sup>1</sup> I went to the Regional Office of Popular Education, called Office of *Narobras*,<sup>2</sup> to inquire about available teaching positions for me and for my wife. Some sympathetic employees suggested to me that those who were qualified educationally and could more or less teach in the Ukrainian language were accepted and appointed to teaching positions immediately, without the usual delays for checking their social and political backgrounds.

Since Tonya and I wanted to leave Yuzovka as soon as possible, we decided to use this opportunity to find employment right away. We found a textbook of Ukrainian language and in a hurry studied the basics of grammar, spelling, and pronunciation, which was not so hard for us to do since we grew up and lived all our lives in the Ukraine and our fathers were of Ukrainian ancestry. Our Southern Russian accent helped us in mastering Ukrainian pronunciation quickly. We were used to hearing and speaking the Southern-Russian dialect used by the common people in the towns. Ukrainian was spoken in that region by the peasants in the villages. Then it suddenly became the new official language of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In the fall of 1924, as soon as we finished our quick course in Ukrainian language, about a week or so before the schools were to start the new school year, we went to the Regional Office of the *Narobras* in the town of Yuzovka and told them that we could teach in Ukrainian language. We were immediately accepted for positions in the village elementary school of Nizhnyaya Krynka. I was appointed as the principal of the school and Tonya as a teacher.

I was told that the former director of the school, Russian Cossack Trofimov, was fired from his position because he didn't want to obey the new rules and to recognize teaching in Ukrainian. Another teacher, a middle-aged Ukrainian man named Petro Grygorovich Shkurupy, was remaining as a second teacher in the school.

I first went to the village alone to see the place.

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1. See the chapter “Khrushchev as a Political Leader at Rabfak.”

2. *Narobras* – acronym for *Narodnoye Oblasovaniye* - Popular Education.

# The Village School

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky and Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Nizhnyaya Krynka was a large village located in the district of Khartsisk in the Ukraine. The peasants there were working in the fields and cultivating mostly grain; however, they also planted corn, sunflowers, millet, and potatoes. They also had vegetable gardens and cherry trees in their backyards; all of them had farm animals, and some were also keeping beehives.

Nearby was an abandoned coalmine that during the revolution was flooded with underground water, which was not pumped out on time, and now the mine was not functioning anymore. Some coal miners moved to the other mines or to the factories in towns, and some became Bolsheviks and took positions as political activists in the countryside.

The elementary village school, which was now called the Four-Year Elementary Labor School, was housed in a building that before the revolution was built as a dormitory for the miners; however there were no miners housed there now. The school was located on the corner of a large village church square, across the street from the former village church. An old village elementary school that was located across the street had been transformed into offices for the Village Soviet, called *Selsoviet*<sup>1</sup>.

The former church had been closed recently by the order of the Bolsheviks and converted to the village club, which in the abbreviated form was called *Kolbud*,<sup>2</sup> with a very funny sounding name. It was encircled by a fancy wrought iron fence, a sign that before the revolution the village had been a prosperous one, able to afford such an expensive decoration.

It was the period of NEP, the so-called New Economic Policy, when small private enterprise was again permitted in the towns and the farmers were allowed to work for themselves and to sell the excess of their produce on the market after paying taxes in kind to the state. Every Sunday during that period, in the village of Nizhnyaya Krynka, farmers markets were held on the large church square, though they were not as lavish as those of the pre-revolutionary years. Suddenly private enterprise and the free, though limited, market economy made foodstuff available on the market after the lean years of revolution and civil war.

The peasants from all neighboring villages and farmsteads were bringing their products there for sale or for barter, which was a very popular form of exchange in the time of rapid currency depreciation and reluctance of the peasants to accept money for their produce. From the nearby towns, the small petty merchants were bringing their consumer merchandise for the peasants to buy. And the people from many nearby hamlets and from the neighboring towns were coming to the market to purchase or barter their used or new consumer goods for flour, grains, potatoes, sunflower oil, milk, butter, farmers' cheese, sour cream, sour milk, lard, meat, vegetables, and fruits. After

the lean years of shortage of food and hunger in the country, this quick revival of commerce was almost miraculous.

The new school had four very large rooms; three of them served as the classrooms. One, as a teachers' room, but it was also used for a students' cooperative, where students could buy all the necessary items for school use, such as notebooks' paper, ink, pencils, pens, erasers, and whatever else was required for their lessons.

The chairman of the *Selsoviet*, Comrade Ofitserov, a former miner, gave me a big agricultural type cart, called *harba* in Ukrainian. It was made in the form of an inverted trapezoid with high sides made of narrow and spaced wooden planks. The horses pulled it, of course, and I had to drive it myself. I arrived on it right up to the door of our apartment in Yuzovka. We loaded our few possessions and climbed on it. Without any hurry, we arrived the same day directly at the door of the school building in the village of Nizhnyaya Krynka.

We unloaded our belongings and placed them in one of the classrooms because the former principal, Trofimov, was still living in the schoolteachers' room. The teacher Petro Grygorovich Shkurupy was living in the village in one room assigned to him at one of the peasants' cottages. Trofimov soon found a job in the village cooperative and vacated the teachers' room and we settled there, waiting for Comrade Ofitserov to find us a place to live.

We lived in the school building for a short time and then moved to a cottage next to the school. The cottage belonged to a huge muzhik with a ferocious expression on his face. The villagers gave him the nickname "The Criminal" because there were rumors that before he moved to the village he lived on the farmstead, where he brutally killed his wife with a hatchet, cut her body into pieces and made it disappear. Since during the revolution and the civil war there were many people who disappeared without a trace and nobody investigated what happened to them, his crime was never brought to justice. The rumors also said that he now was regularly "visiting" his brother's young and pretty wife. His brother was a skinny and sickly fellow, who was afraid of his huge brother; as soon as the brother entered his cottage, he would walk out and leave the brother alone with his wife.

We lived in one half of the cottage in three rooms, and the muzhik lived in the other two rooms. Right from the beginning, we had a conflict with the owner because Tonya wanted to lock the door connecting the two parts of the cottage and he didn't want to give her a key. He insisted on keeping the connecting door unlocked. Of course, knowing the village rumors about him, Tonya was afraid of him, especially when she had to leave our small daughter with a peasant girl, Natasha, who came to look after her during the day. Therefore, we asked Comrade Ofitserov to find us another place to live.

Soon Comrade Ofitserov arranged for us to have the cottage of the former parish priest, who died shortly after the church was closed. His wife was ordered to rent a room from a widow in the village.

Our cottage was located on the opposite corner from the school, across the church square and facing the former church—the present *Kolbud*—where all the village meetings were held. A fence encircled the cottage's front, one side, and the back including a courtyard and a small cherry garden, while another side of the house facing the side street was unfenced. Inside the courtyard there was a small vegetable garden and a barn.

It was a typical Ukrainian village cottage painted white inside and outside. Holding the metal roof—not the straw thatched roof as on the other peasants' cottages—were round wooden posts. Those stood on the high *zavalinka*, a narrow mound of earth along the cottage's outer walls that ended on the landing of the steps leading to the entrance door of the enclosed small porch. From the porch there was a door to a small hall leading into a kitchen and into two rooms. The cottage was roomy and well lighted by many windows, and we felt very comfortable in it after living the last few years in small rooms of apartments, and without much privacy.

During the first school year our salaries from *Rayispolkom*<sup>3</sup> in the town of Khartsisk were so inadequate that we could not live on them. However, at that time in the village a custom remained from the pre-revolutionary years. At the beginning of the school year the parents of the students would bring the teachers all kinds of food: flour, potatoes, millet, sunflower oil, bread, and honey. Then during the school year students would bring the teachers bread, butter, fresh and pickled vegetables and fruits. This way we were able to live well provided with food during the first year.

In the spring the *Selsoviet* gave us a small lot in the fields where we planted potatoes and sunflowers for our family. When we were planting potatoes, our daughter, who was at that time about two and half years old, was playing "planting" and she planted our cottage keys. It took us a while to dig the place until we found them. We also planted corn in our backyard for the chicks and ducks that the hen had hatched in a big basket in the corner of our porch; after we kept them in our barn.

That spring the school's cleaning woman brought us a small puppy. He was white with ginger spots and long fluffy fur resembling a downy ball; we named him Sharyk.<sup>4</sup> He had so many fleas that we could not take him in the house. The cleaning woman suggested smearing the puppy with petroleum to kill the fleas. Since we had petroleum for our lighting, Tonya did it right away that evening. Poor Sharyk, he cried the whole night. We didn't know what to do with him. Finally, in the morning we gave him a bath and removed the petroleum and all the dead fleas with it.

Sharyk heroically withstood the torture and as a reward was allowed to stay with the hen on the porch. Next night he cuddled up near the hen and she accepted him together with her newly hatched chicks. The only problem was that by sleeping with the hen he crushed three chicks.

Although Sharyk was an ordinary mongrel, he was a very smart dog and learned fast. I taught him to run around the fence every night and to bark if there was somebody in the vicinity. This came in very handy later, when his vigilance became important for our family's tranquility.

Natasha, who was watching our small daughter Lyalya in our cottage, began to steal from us; one day Tonya discovered that she had stolen her gold chain that she kept as a keepsake from her childhood. Well, we dismissed her, and Lyalya, who was then almost three years old, began coming to school with us and staying in the back row of the classroom during the lessons, some-times with me and sometimes with her mother. She was quite happy to play with paper and pencils and to look at pictures in the books. She especially liked the art lessons, where she actively participated in drawing with colored pencils and could walk around and look at the pupils' pictures. Tonya remembered one incident that occurred during one of the art lessons in her class, when one of the boys drew a horse. In his imagination it probably looked so real to him

that he suddenly screamed loudly, "Pr-r-u-u!"<sup>5</sup> as if he was trying to stop the horse from running away from him.

Another incident in school that Lyalya witnessed probably influenced her for a long time. This happened when the nurse came to our school to give inoculations against smallpox. It was pandemonium, children were crying, screaming, running away. We had to lock all the windows and doors and pull the children from the classroom one by one, and hold them still so the nurse could disinfect and make a scratch on their arms. After that incident Lyalya for a long time had a fear of doctors and nurses.

One terrible accident occurred in the village after a small circus came to the village club and the whole school attended the performance. Peasants' children had never seen anything like it before and were very impressed with the show. Among the many other performers was an acrobat on a trapeze. The next morning when the parents went to work in the fields, one of the boys did not come to school but stayed home to show his younger sister how it was done. He made himself a primitive trapeze by attaching a rope with a wooden stick to the barn beam and accidentally hanged himself.

During the second year in Nizhnyaya Krynka we settled down and our life at the school and in the village was running smoothly. We even bought a small piglet and started to raise him, hoping to have good pork meat for the next year. One day in the spring, after having raised him the whole winter, he jumped out of his enclosure and escaped. For several weeks we searched but couldn't find him.

In the village beside the school was an orphanage that was called The Children's Little Town. It was located not far from our cottage and near the village cooperative on the street leading from the church square toward the doctor's office. Those children did not attend the village school, but they had their own teachers and instructors with whom we had good relationships. One of the instructors, a friend of ours, discovered that the children, in agreement with the cook, were bringing the discards of food from the kitchen to the basement. He followed them and found out that they were feeding a piglet.

Interrupting each other, the children told him:

"We found the piglet in our orphanage yard..."

"We chased and chased him..."

"Finally, when we captured him, we gave him a refuge in the basement..."

"And we were feeding him every day!"

When our friend heard that our piglet had disappeared, he notified us and we rescued the poor animal, which had become skinny after the two weeks of poor nutrition.

Although we had friendly relations with all the teachers from our school and the teachers and instructors from the orphanage, one of them, an Austrian, a former prisoner of war with Germany who married a Russian woman and remained in Russia, became our very good friend. He was the vocational instructor in the orphanage woodshop. We often visited his family and they visited us. They also had a daughter about one year older than Lyalya.

One day we were visiting our friends and they pulled out of a trunk a beautiful doll with a porcelain face, arms, and legs, and dressed in an organdy gown decorated with fine lace. She opened and closed her eyes and had a curly blond hair with a big bow.

Everybody was admiring it. For those days in the Soviet Union it was an unusual doll. It was made in Austria and was a present from his parents to their granddaughter. It was kept hidden all the time and they did not allow even their daughter to play with it. That day they allowed each girl to hold it with an adult keeping hands on it for safety. When the time came for us to go home, Lyalya began to cry and wanted to bring the doll home. There was no way to calm her down or to reason with her; she was obstinate in her demand. Finally, our friends agreed to let us take the doll for one evening with the condition that it be returned the next morning.

Lyalya was about three-years old at that time and, when we got home, both Tonya and I decided that it was foolish not to allow her to hold the doll. We were both convinced that she would just hold it for a while and calm herself down. She was sitting on a chair, holding the doll and admiring it. Suddenly, she decided to get down and in that moment... Oh, what a horror! ... The doll fell on the wooden floor and one side of the porcelain face broke in small pieces... I collected all the pieces up to the last microscopic particle and stayed up the whole night gluing it all together. Early in the morning I drove to Yuzovka, where I found an artist who was able to repaint it quite well, but of course, the masterpiece was damaged forever. For our friends it was a deep disappointment and after it happened our friendship remained damaged too.

Another good friend that we had in Nizhnyaya Krynka was a physician who lived far from us, up on the hill. Our families also used to visit each other. We simply called him Doctor and I cannot remember his last name. He was the only one close enough to help in any medical emergency.

One day Lyalya, as she liked to do and as she had done many times before, was going round-and-round the post on the *zavalinka*, then stopping to see everything spinning around her. It was fun—until she could not keep her equilibrium and suddenly fell down on the ground, where she hit a big stone with a sharp point.

Tonya heard crying, ran out of the cottage, and found Lyalya with a big cut on her forehead. She grabbed her in her arms and began to run to the doctor. A storm was nearing, the lightning was flashing across the sky, and the thunder roared over her head, all the things Tonya was so afraid of from her childhood.<sup>6</sup> But she was so scared at seeing her daughter's bloody forehead that she didn't seem to notice the lightning or the thunder. The heavy rain poured on them but she was running and running. When she reached the doctors home, they were both wet to the skin.

In the middle of Lyalya's forehead was a big swollen bump with a large cut that looked like her brains were coming out. Doctor sewed the wound with several stitches and put a cold compress on the bump. When the storm ended, the doctor sent a youngster to the school to call me and I came to take them home.

After two years in Nizhnyaya Krynka, I suggested to the *Narobras* that there was a need to add another three years of studies to our four-year school. Many parents of the village children who completed the four years wanted them to continue their studies. *Narobras* approved it, and the *Selsoviet* gave the school another building that was located across the street. It had three big rooms and served well for this purpose. Therefore, I organized there the so-called *Semiletka*, or a Seven-Year School.

Tonya was teaching Russian language there, which was then a required subject in all Ukrainian schools. I asked *Narobras* to hire new teachers for the elementary grades and to teach other subjects in the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. I still

remember some of the names of those teachers; one was Rozhko and another was Fyedorov.

Then there was a young woman teacher whose name I don't recall, but I remember that she had dark brown eyes, black hair, was light complexioned with cheeks color of a cherry just picked up from the tree. Being young, single, and pretty, she had all the male teachers from our school and from the orphanage running after her. She always complained to Tonya that she didn't know to whom she should give her preference, "They all are so nice, how can I select who is right for me?" With all her popularity with men, she did not have any luck with her pupils and had a very hard time maintaining discipline in her classes—one could hear her constantly screaming at the pupils.

I remember another incident that happened when the newly appointed—by Bolshevik authorities—manager of the *Kolbud* called a villagers' meeting to organize the various cultural clubs. He ordered all former choristers of the church choir to become members of the village choir club and brought them sheet music with the new revolutionary songs to learn for the performances during the newly introduced revolutionary festivities. Then he appointed one of our teachers to organize a theater club and promised that copies for the performances of the proletarian plays would be furnished from the *Raykom Agitprop*<sup>7</sup> office. But he showed his Bolshevik distorted ingenuity by appointing the teacher Fyedorov, who was a son of a former village priest, to conduct the anti-religious propaganda lectures. To the teacher's complaint that he would not know how to do it, the *Kolbud* manager answered, "Don't you worry. If you are able to read, the *Raykom Agitprop* office will supply you with all the instructions and pamphlets needed to do this."

Another incident in the village was a big fire that engulfed a cottage standing not far from ours on the church square. It is amazing that my daughter Lyalya, who was not yet four years old, remembered this fire all her life. It happened late at night and the flames from the burning thatched straw roof were raising high in the dark sky. The owner, a very tall muzhik, was standing in front of his burning cottage screaming in desperation and tearing apart his white shirt. All the neighborhood was on the church square and on the neighboring streets. Everybody was bringing buckets of water to splash on the fire, fearing that the flames would spread to the straw roofs of their own cottages. Luckily there was no wind, not even the slightest, and the fire burned itself out without damaging any other structure.

Being always in the classroom with us, Lyalya showed very early interest in reading and writing. I started to teach her to read when she was about three-and-a-half years old and to write a few months later. I used a whole word method. All walls in our cottage were patched with papers on which I drew pictures of familiar objects and under the picture in large letters printed the name for it. Every day I would go with my daughter around the rooms until she learned the words. Then I would switch the place of the pictures in the room and train her until I was sure that she was able to recognize them. Next, I would cover up the picture and leave only the word until she was able to name them all.

In the same way I taught her to write. I did not teach the single letters, but right away taught her to write whole words. By the time she was four years old she was writing letters to her grandfather. We kept one of her postcards for a long time as a

keepsake. She wrote by herself with big letters on the address side: "Nikitovka, Telegraph, *Dyeda*<sup>8</sup> Gladky," and on the other side: "Dear *Dyeda* come soon. Kisses. Lyalya."

My father was so impressed that he came with my brother Igor to visit us in Nizhnyaya Krynka. Since I had never returned to Nikitovka from the time of my flight from the GPU inquiries, it was the first time that my father had seen his granddaughter. Igor had come once before to visit us during his school vacations. At that time he got sick from eating too many cherries in our garden.

After Lyalya had learned to read and write, she followed the Russian lessons in her mother's classes, sitting on the back desk. She learned arithmetic sitting in my classroom. Since she challenged herself to do the more advanced problems, I just followed her progress at her own speed.

In 1927 Tonya had an infection in the right cheekbone.<sup>9</sup> It resulted from a badly made filling made by her sister Tanya when she was practicing as a dental student in Kharkov. Our friend the village doctor, ordered Tonya to consult a specialist immediately. She was lucky that she had a large opening to the nasal cavity and some pus was discharged through it relieving the pressure and preventing it from going to the brain. She arrived in time at the clinic at the Slavyansk Kurort, where many famous doctors of all specialties came during the summer from all over the country. One well-known professor from Kharkov performed the operation. We still remember that he broke his instrument in making the opening in the bone through the nose and blamed it on Tonya's hard bones. According to this professor, only a few days delay could have resulted in the infection going to the brain with tragic results and probably death.

While Tonya was in Slavyansk, Lyalya was staying with my sister Anya, who was living with her common-law husband, Sergey Ivanovich Plokhodyn, in Taganrog. Anya worked as a nurse in a hospital and Sergey was employed by the railroad station. They lived in a big house once belonging to a rich family. The house had been adapted as an apartment house for many families. It had a long poorly lighted hall with many doors to the single and two-room apartments. Although there was a small common kitchen shared by all tenants, in front of each door in the hall there was a small stool with a one-burner primus-stove for cooking.

I asked my sister why they didn't get married. Anya explained to me in a whisper, "These walls have many ears... As you know, I met Sergey in a hospital when he was recuperating from typhoid fever. Meanwhile, his White Cossacks regiment, where he was an officer, had retreated from the Reds. We moved here to the bigger town where nobody knows him, but many of my schoolmates know me and our cousin Bonifaty's family. Until now the strategy has worked quite well. But Sergey doesn't want anything to happen to me if he is arrested." Then she added, "Every time we hear somebody at the door, we are afraid that the GPU agents are here to arrest him."

"Yes," I answered, "I know what you mean. This 'White' past is haunting me too. In Nikitovka and in Yuzovka, I found out in time to slip away from the investigations. So far in the village we've been lucky; the need for teachers who can teach in Ukrainian is so great that we have been left in peace for these two years. Who knows what to expect tomorrow?"

When I came to take Lyalya home, the famous Durov Circus was performing in Taganrog and I took her to see it. What a remarkable spectacle it was! For years and

years Lyalya remembered many details.<sup>10</sup>

One of the best performances by the animals and birds was the act called “The Train.” A big white goose wearing a red cap and black jacket was the railroad stationmaster, who pulled a cord with his beak to ring the bell announcing the arrival and the departure of the train.

In the station barber shop there were two chimpanzees, one sitting in front of a big mirror portrayed a passenger waiting for the train, and the other was a barber wearing a white coat. The barber chimp put a big white towel around the neck of the passenger chimp, then with a big brush spread foam on her face and started to shave the foam with a huge razor. What a comedy it was, as both of the chimps were making all kinds of grimaces!

Then the train arrived with some animals sitting in the passenger cars and looking through the windows. Some others were running on the platform to catch the train and were accommodating themselves in the empty seats. Then there were animals that came to see the passengers off, and they were waving their paws. There were all kinds of animals, all dressed in fancy hats and outfits, holding bags and umbrellas. There were poodles and other small dogs, cats, foxes, raccoons, bunnies, and very small chimps, penguins in their dinner coats and tall hats, and other funny exotic animals. Some were walking on hind feet and some on all fours and all were rushing and running like real people when they have to catch the train.

After there were elephants who danced, standing on their hind legs and walking carefully over a beautifully dressed girl who was lying on the ground.

And there were clowns! Oh, clowns! Short and tall, skinny and fat, with big red mouths and funny hats, multi-colored costumes and hilarious tricks—rolling on the floor, jumping, dancing, skipping, falling, crying, laughing...

Then there were dancing and prancing horses and a beautiful horsewoman in a shimmering costume... And the big brown Russian bear dancing and fighting with his trainer... And ferocious lions obediently walking over to sit on high stools... And high in the air acrobats flying on the trapeze and walking fearlessly on the wire... It was a lifetime experience! Lyalya talked about this and that scene year after year remembering many details of what she had seen when she was only four years old.

Until the year 1927 our life in the village was going smoothly and harmoniously with the other teachers in our school, with the parents of our pupils, and in general within the village community. In fact, all we remember are mostly the everyday experiences that happened in our family, in the school, and in the village. Nothing had happened during that time to disturb our idyllic life in the country.

Then across the whole Soviet Union the new period called “collectivization” began, one of the most devastating and terrible periods for the peasantry. In the winter of 1927-28, two Bolshevik party members were assigned to our village from the *Raykom*<sup>11</sup> of the party. One was a collectivization agent and another, Comrade Gavriylov, was appointed as chairman of the to-be-organized *kolkhoz* in Nizhnyaya Krynka. They came at regular intervals to conduct meetings about the collectivization in the village and in the neighboring farmsteads. They brought mountains of propaganda brochures with them from the *Raykom Agitprop*<sup>12</sup> office with an order and instructions to the village *Selsoviet* that all those brochures about the organization of the *kolkhoz* had to be read to the peasants at the village and farmsteads meetings, and the reports about

those meetings had to be sent on time to the *Raykom*.

As the teacher and the principal of the local school, I was ordered by the *Raykom* agents to act as a secretary for all meetings that they conducted and to write the reports for them. Every time the village and farmsteads meeting was called, I was ordered by the *Selsoviet* chairman, Comrade Ofitserov, to come to the meeting to read all this propaganda literature and to write a report of the meeting. I did it with great reluctance, but I could not refuse it, knowing the consequences of losing my position. I knew that Comrade Ofitserov, as a former miner, was not literate enough to read it or to write the reports, and it became a part of my duties as a literate person to do this repugnant task.

Ipsa facto, I was forced to act as a "propaganda mouth" of the *Raykom Agitprop* office for the collectivization. At all those meetings the peasants saw me, me as a person, in front of them reading the propaganda garbage. And there was no mistake, they could hear the words that were coming from my mouth, not flying from the piece of paper in my hands. They were listening with distrust to the words that described all the "benefits, joys, and advantages" of giving up all their farm animals, all their land, and themselves to the *kolkhoz*, the collective farm, where everything would belong to "all" in common, and to nobody in particular. The villagers didn't have to be very clever or literate to understand that what they were asked to do was to suddenly give to *kolkhoz* everything they had and become the "have-nots."

Muzhyks listened to all this propaganda in silence. Then after one of the meetings one of them asked me, "And you, you will also enroll in the *kolkhoz*?"

I looked at the chairman of the *Selsoviet*, who nodded with his head, suggesting that I say, "Yes." What could I answer under those circumstances? And I answered something like this, "If it should become necessary, I would have to enroll, too."

Well, after these meeting muzhiks in the village began to be very hostile toward me. After several more meetings were held with the collectivization agent pressuring the peasants more and more to enroll voluntarily in the *kolkhoz*, the hostility was slowly turning into hatred toward the agent and me. I was standing in the middle of their battle with the Soviet authorities. The only difference was that after the meeting the collectivization agent would return to the regional office in Khartsisk, but I would remain in the village, and was an easy target for the revenge of the frustrated muzhiks. And who could have blamed them? I was on their side, but could do nothing about it; they couldn't do anything either. I was in the middle of their battle to preserve their property and way of life.

By February of 1928, all peasants of Nizhnyaya Krynka were finally forced to sign a declaration that they had "voluntarily enrolled" into *kolkhoz*, as it was officially reported by the collectivization agent in the declaration written by me under his dictation, and presented to the *Raykom*. The same shameful farce was happening everywhere in the villages and farmsteads throughout the Soviet Union. The chairman of the new *kolkhoz*, Bolshevik Comrade Gavriylov, who was appointed by the *Raykom*, arrived shortly afterwards to live and work in the village.

I am sure that the peasants were convinced that I was the agent of the *Raykom* and therefore considered me their enemy; they began to play all kinds of dirty tricks on me. The worst of it was that their revenge also became directed against my family. At night they would throw stones in the windows of our cottage. We had to lock all the

window shutters and doors and stay in the hall, or in the room in which the windows looked out on the courtyard. Our devoted dog Sharyk performed very well during this difficult time. Every evening and at intervals during the night I would give him my command, "Sharyk, go and search!" He would run around the house and near the fence in the courtyard and at the slightest rustle would bark, and bark, and bark like he understood that something was wrong and that he had to be more vigilant than he had ever been before.

By the end of the school year we got tired of being harassed and living in the constant tension of not knowing what would happen next. Therefore, we decided to move from Nizhnyaya Krynka. During the winter I had already started to prepare myself for this possibility and had enrolled in a bookkeeping course at the correspondence school in Rostov-on-Don. I thought that one more specialization could be helpful in finding employment. After the school was closed for the summer vacations I had to go and take the examination in bookkeeping at Rostov-on-Don.

On my way there I stopped to visit my sister Anya and my cousin Bonifaty in Taganrog, where I wanted to also explore the opportunities of finding employment. But both of them suggested that in Taganrog too many people knew me as a student in the gymnasium and knew that I was from Nikitovka. And this would make it very easy for the authorities to find out everything about my past in case of an investigation. They suggested that I look in places where nobody knew me.

We talked with Anya about our father who was ill and that the local doctor suspected it was tuberculosis. I told her I was planning to stop on my way back in Nikitovka to see my father, my sister Vera, and my brother Igor and that I would let her know about my father's condition.

Anya and Bonifaty told me that our cousin Boris, a son of Uncle Pyetr, had visited them quite recently and that he was living in Rostov-on-Don, and Anya gave me his address. After I passed the examinations in bookkeeping, I found my cousin Boris, who told me the tragic story<sup>13</sup> of what had happened to him and to his sister Lida. But I was glad that he had learned to work as a movie projectionist and had steady work at the movie theater. He was also planning to visit his sister Lida and his father in Crimea.

On my return to Nizhnyaya Krynka, Tonya and I had to make a decision about where we would move from there.

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1. *Selsoviet* – acronym for *Selsky Soviet* – the Village Soviet.

2. *Kolbud* – acronym for *Kollectyvny Budynok* [Ukrainian] - a collective's building.

3. *Rayispolkom*- acronym for *Rayonny Ispolnytelny Komitet* - The District Executive Committee.

4. Which means a little ball.

5. A sound used in Ukraine to command the horses to stop.

6. See the chapter "The Thunderstorms."

7. *Raykom Agitprop* – acronym for *Rayonny Komitet Of Agitazii Y Propagandy* - The Regional Committee of Agitation and Propaganda.

8. Short for Dyedushka, a grandfather, as commonly used by small children.

9. Called Gaymorov's cavity.

10. This episode as remembered by Olga Gladky Verro.

11. *Rayounny Komitet* - The District Committee.

12. *Agitprop* - acronym for *Agitatsiya y propaganda* - agitation and propaganda.

13. See the chapter "Lidka."

# Nikitovka's Last Gentleman

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

On my way back home from Rostov-on-Don I stopped in Nikitovka to visit my father and my sister Vera.<sup>1</sup> After we escaped with my wife Tonya from Nikitovka to Yuzovka<sup>2</sup> I tried not to return home except for very short visits because too many people knew that I had been a volunteer in the White Army.

As soon as I arrived, my sister Vera told me, "Our father is gravely ill. Because he had been coughing for a long time the railroad doctor Bogdanov sent him to Bakhmut for a check-up to have a confirmation of his diagnosis. There the doctor said that he indeed had tuberculosis, which had reached the last stage and nothing could help him anymore."

I embraced and comforted her with gentle hugging. "You know," she told me after she took hold of her emotions, "all of his telegraph coworkers are so fond of our father. All this time that he was ill and had to stay home so often, they took turns substituting for him on the job so he wouldn't be laid off and would receive his regular salary instead of the reduced sick pay."

I found my father in very serious condition. Though he was trying not to show that he was a dying man, his appearance was awful. He was glad to see me, and Vera said that he really perked up during my one-day visit. I told them what was happening in the village and that we were planning to move from there, but were not sure yet where we wanted to go.

When I was leaving the next morning, Vera told me, "As you can see, father clearly understands that he is dying and because of it suffers enormously. Loneliness increases his suffering. Being busy with the household chores I cannot keep him company; what he needs is companionship. I think if you could move here and be with your father, you could brighten up his life a little, or better to say, the remaining days of his life that God allotted to him. My dear brother, think and talk to your wife about it. Maybe it could be a temporary solution for your problem, too. If you think that you could move here, write to me immediately about your decision."

When I returned home, I told Tonya about my father's illness and about my sister's invitation. We decided that this could be a transitional solution for us and that we would stay there probably only a short time. After all, we had decided to leave Nizhnyaya Krynka anyway. It gave us the credible and nonpolitical reason to suddenly leave our employment. And we would at least have a place to stay while looking for employment elsewhere. for our temporary relocation from the village.

Therefore, I disregarded my usual precautions and decided to try to return to my birthplace and find a position in some school, either in Nikitovka or in the neighboring communities. I sincerely hoped that maybe after all this time some changes in the revolutionary zeal of the Bolsheviks against the ex-Whites had occurred. I was prepared

to try and see what direction the wind was blowing. I mailed a telegram right away to my sister notifying her that we were coming to Nikitovka immediately.

Tonya and I went to Khartsisk in *Narobras*<sup>3</sup> office and talked to the inspector, Comrade Rymyha, with whom I had a good relationship from the time he hired us. I explained the condition of my father to him and on that ground requested a voluntary discharge from my duties of school principal, and Tonya as a teacher, which he accepted with regret. Since our records were more than excellent, this was written in our dismissal papers. In the village I turned over all school papers to the chairman of the *Sel'soviet*, who was completely surprised with our decision.

We hired one peasant, whom we knew respected us, to transport our belongings and us to Nikitovka. Very early in the morning, before sunrise, we loaded his harba with the few furniture pieces we had, a trunk with our clothes, and several boxes with books and kitchen utensils. Tonya and Lyalya sat next to him on the driver's seat and I rode on a bicycle behind the cart, since it was about forty kilometers from Nizhnyaya Krynka to Nikitovka. At that time we didn't know where we would find employment or where our next home would be. We only knew that it was time for us to leave here and that we had a temporary place to stay.

Only the school cleaning woman came to see us off. And the only regret we had was to leave behind our dog Sharyk, who was yelping and trying to jump on the wagon and wanted to go with us, as if he knew that we were not returning. He had been such a true friend to us in that difficult time that we felt almost ashamed not to take him with us. Our consolation was that the school cleaning woman, who gave him to us as a puppy, agreed to take him back.

In the summer of 1928 I returned with my family to my birthplace. It was late afternoon when the harba with our belongings stopped at the door of my father's apartment. We unloaded all our things and placed them wherever we could find a place in the two rooms and placed our double bed in the living-dining room area.<sup>4</sup> My sister Vera had her own bedroom and my father slept in the nook of the divided portion of the big room.

Therefore, to some degree, we all had some privacy, although one had to walk through the living room to my father's nook. My brother Igor was attending technical school in the neighboring town of Artyemovsk, the former town of Bakhmut, and was living there at that time. Vera didn't work and took care of the home and our father.

After a few days of rest, I went to the local office of *Narobras*, where I found my old acquaintances, schoolmates, and simply nice people, who right away helped me find a position as a teacher of geography in the local Seven-Year Trade School. The school was located in the former gymnasium and its principal was a former headmistress of the Women's gymnasium in Taganrog, Mar'ya Petrovna, who for lack of qualified persons from the proletarian class was appointed to that position.

Tonya and I decided right away that with my father being ill with tuberculosis in the last and infectious stage, it was not a place for our small daughter to live and to expose her to possible contamination. And although my father enjoyed watching his granddaughter, her lively play sometimes disturbed him during his rest time. Vera was not used to young children running around the house and was very strict with her niece if she made noise when our father was asleep. Sometimes Lyalya would start to play on a harmonium, making discordant sounds, or would play with their cat or dog. Then she

got in the habit of rocking at full speed on her grandfather's rocking chair; Vera would chase her and admonish her for it. My father, though he seemed to be sleeping, would tell her, "Vera, please, let the little girl enjoy herself; really, she is not bothering me." But Vera was firm in guarding our father's tranquility.

Tonya wrote to her sister Nyusya, who after graduation from the Kharkovsky Medical Institute was working in a hospital as an eye doctor and lived in the mining hamlet of Snyezhnoye.

Tonya asked her sister to inquire if there were any openings for teachers in the local schools. Nyusya notified her that there were some openings and that Tonya should come immediately to apply for the new school year. Tonya went there and found that the new *Gorpromuch*<sup>5</sup> was opening its doors in the fall of the 1928-29 school year. The administration was looking for a qualified teacher who had experience in working with adult students. Tonya's previous employment at the Rabfak in Yuzovka was an invaluable reference at the time, when teachers for the many new schools for adults were hard to find. She was hired on the spot to teach Russian language and literature there.

Nyusya lived in a two room apartment with a kitchen and an entrance hall. She offered Tonya the smaller room. We shipped our few belongings by rail to Snyezhnoye, and Tonya moved there with Lyalya.<sup>6</sup>

I remained in Nikitovka to keep my father company. Before the schools started in September, I dedicated my time to my father. In good weather we made short strolls on the path edged by the lilac bushes that divided the row of apartment houses from the rail tracks. During our walks we shared the last news about our relatives, about the family, and about people we knew.

On one of our first walks I told him, "Papa, when I was in Rostov-on-Don for the exams, for a few short hours I saw my cousin Boris, who told me what happened to him and his sister *Lidochka*."<sup>7</sup>

"That rascal!" my father exclaimed. "Did he show any embarrassment about seeing you?"

"No. Why should he be embarrassed about seeing me?"

"For stealing from his uncle!" He replied reproachfully.

I tried to convince my father why Boris behaved as he did, "You know, Papa, he struggled for survival from the time he was less than nine years old; maybe his vagrant life left him with a different set of values and moral conduct. Probably he had already forgotten about stealing from you, or maybe he thought I did not know about it at all. Anyway, it happened five years ago, when he was not yet fourteen years old and did not know how to provide for himself other than by stealing. It seems that he has straightened out his life. When I saw him he looked quiet well and was dressed decently. He was working as a projectionist in one of the movie theaters. It seems that he settled down after the unfortunate, troubled years of his childhood and youth and was talking about enrolling in a technical school. He was also planning to go to Feodosia to visit his sister and his father."

"Well," answered my father, "I had offered for him to stay with us. He didn't have to remain homeless anymore. But he chose to return to his vagrant life. Let's hope that he stays on the right track now," concluded my father with less bitterness. My father was tiring quickly and we had to return home sooner than I expected.

In the afternoons I usually read the newspapers and books to my father because he didn't have the strength to read for long periods of time. Sometimes I played his preferred pieces of music on his old harmonium<sup>8</sup> for him. My younger brother Igor made him a crystal receiver in his radio class, and I would find the transmissions of classical music from the radio stations abroad, and then pass the earphones to my father, who was lying in bed. My father, who knew, but most of all passionately loved music, could lie in bed for hours listening to classical music. During that time his face reflected calmness and tender emotion.

It was at that time that my father received from his youngest brother Pavel<sup>9</sup> a very short letter written from the town of Vladivostok. He wrote only a few conventional phrases, saying that he was alive, in good health, and hoped the same was so for all of us. And he asked us to write, if possible. It was simply signed, "Your Pavel." My father was very happy to learn that his brother was alive and well, because for several years nobody knew what had happened to him since the last letter that he mailed from Vladivostok at the onset of the civil war. After that we used to guess with my father that maybe his brother had immigrated to England, or maybe he was arrested as an "enemy of the people" for his counter-revolutionary activities as a Ukrainian nationalist. Now at least we knew that he remained in Russia.

Also during this time when I was taking care of my dying father, we suddenly had a visit from the father of my good friend Vadim Kuzenko, with whom I enrolled as a volunteer in the White Army and with whom I served in the Fifth Battery of the Artillery Brigade under the command of General Drozdovsky in defending Perekop and Crimea.<sup>10</sup> His father, Yelisyey Ivanovich, recounted that he was returning home after testifying before the GPU in the town of Odessa during the investigation of his son. After a defeat of the Whites in Crimea Vadim succeeded in escaping abroad, lived for several years in France, and decided to return home with some of his friends on a motorboat from Bulgaria through the Black Sea. They were caught, taken to Odessa and put in the cellars of the GPU. Their relatives were summoned and interrogated, but were not allowed to see the prisoners.

Yelisyey Ivanovich was very upset and told us that now his career on the railway was over, that his days of freedom were running out and that he could expect any day to hear GPU knocking at his door. He said that as soon as he returned home to Taganrog his last deed would be to take care of his wife by buying her a small cottage in the country. That was the last time we saw him.<sup>11</sup>

With the beginning of the school year I could not devote so much time to my father. The school hours and endless meetings were taking most of my time. In addition, since I already knew Ukrainian, the director of the school sent me to attend evening courses called "Ukrainization for the Teachers." My father understood and resigned himself to my long absences during the days and nights, because he knew that I was not too far away. Even when the meetings ended past midnight, sometimes as late as one or two o'clock in the morning, he knew that when I returned home he would hear my voice asking him, "Well, Papa, how did you feel today? Are you tired?" Or I would ask, "Are you resting, Papa? Can I do something for you?" Knowing that I was close by had a calming effect on him and I was pleased with that. He told me that he was not worrying anymore that Vera would remain alone when he died and that I would take care of his funeral.

Late in the autumn we noticed that every day he was losing his strength and we stopped our strolls on Sundays. Now he was mostly staying in bed and eating very little. His doctor told us that our father might probably last until February or at the latest until March. Now all my free time was spent sitting near his bed. I observed him closely and became convinced that the doctor's estimate was right.

At that time we received a letter from my uncle Pyetr's wife. She was notifying us that he was gravely ill and was transferred from Feodosia to the railway hospital in the town of Simferopol. Shortly thereafter, we received a telegram that he died. Vera and I decided not to tell my father because we didn't want to upset him with this tragic news. Our aunt Marusya went alone to her brother's funeral and then stopped to visit our father on her way back home. She told us, but not my father, that Boris and Lida came for the funeral of their father.

In January 1929 the political campaign started for the elections to be held sometime late that spring. These were the elections for all levels of the Soviet government bodies, on the local, district, regional, and central levels. To have a right to vote, all residents were notified about an obligatory registration. I knew that for me this was a very dangerous time, but there was no other solution; I could not leave my sister alone with our dying father and, in order to stay, I had to register myself as a resident of Nikitovka. Shortly after the registration I received a notice from the authorities stating that as a known former *byelogvadyeyets*,<sup>12</sup> I was deprived of civil and voting rights. Vera and I decided not to tell our dying father and let him be without worries in the last days of his life.

In the beginning I was almost happy about my new status—I was relieved of “the right to be elected” and “the right to vote.” From the point of view of an enemy of the Soviet regime, it looked to me to be an almost excellent solution. Now I didn't have to take part directly or indirectly in the election campaigns, didn't have to raise my hand in the disgusting “voluntary” procedure of being forced to approve the Bolshevik Party lists of candidates. And I felt almost like a normal and morally healthy individual who didn't have the need anymore to pretend all the time that I supported the Soviet regime. It was as if some heavy burden fell off my shoulders. I suddenly felt free.

But my happiness was short-lived. The next day I began to see clearly the consequences of being a *lishenyets*.<sup>13</sup> In the morning, as soon as I came to school, the office clerk came to me and whispered a message in my ear, “Would you please go to see Mar'ya Petrovna. She has an urgent matter to discuss with you.” Being summoned put me on the alert and I knocked very carefully at the door of the school director.

Mar'ya Petrovna, the former headmistress of the Gymnasium, was now a director of the Seven-Year Trade School. The times had changed. She knew that her position was on shaky ground. As soon as some party member with reasonable qualifications appeared, her old intelligentsia background would become a cause for her dismissal. Therefore, she learned to maneuver between the opposite forces of good and evil and find the path to survival in those unsettled times.

Her manner of talking with subordinates depended on the person she was dealing with. Some she greeted with a quiet smile and friendly conversation; others with apparent calmness and a lot of restraint; and with some, she was very strict, though she tried not to be bossy. In the last case, she sat directly in front of the person and always kept her head with the graying hair bent to one side, as if she was deflecting it from a

blow that could hit her at any moment.

I knocked carefully the second time. "Enter!" sounded her ringing voice from the office. I opened the door and slowly entered the room. Mar'ya Petrovna was sitting behind her large desk. Over her head hung Lenin's<sup>14</sup> portrait. As I glanced at his sly physiognomy, at that moment, for some unknown reason, it appeared to me that on the forehead of this leader of a world revolution barely visible little horns were beginning to shoot, and I thought, *devil!*

"Good morning, Mar'ya Petrovna," I said, coming closer to the desk.

"Good morning, good morning," she saluted me without hiding the annoyance in her voice, and started to talk to me showing her nervousness openly, "Sit down, please, Orest Mikhailovich. I don't know where to start... There is trouble... What I am going to do with you? How I am going to tell you this?"

I understood that this was the beginning of the reprisals that I had anticipated, and calmly asked her, "Probably, this is in regard to me being deprived of civil rights?"

"Yes, yes, my dear... Yes, yes... You should know... I am now a very small person... Nobody is taking my opinion into consideration... I can't do anything to help you... It is even difficult to suggest anything... You know yourself, the times have changed... I can only express my sympathy. But how would my sympathy help you?!"

In a calm voice I asked her, "Tell me, Mar'ya Petrovna, but straight forward, what did really happen?"

"Well, you see," she was encouraged by my calm and direct question, "they called me from the *Narobras* early this morning and told me that I should not allow you to continue to teach in school because you are a *lishenyets*. This is terrible, really terrible! You, my dear, will be remaining without work, but we are losing an excellent teacher. These are terrible times. I am afraid for you. It will be very hard for you to find another position. But you may try anyway in *Narobras* to see Sergey Sergeyevich; he is a very warm-hearted person, and he is a non-party man. He might tell you what to do. Go immediately there, do not delay." And she added emphatically, like trying to encourage me to act, "You know the proverb 'Strike while the iron is hot!'"

I could not explain why, but I listened very calmly to all the "excuses" of poor Mar'ya Petrovna, who continued, "Forgive me for having to tell you such unpleasant news. But the times now are like this, one doesn't know today what to expect for oneself. You understand what I mean?"

Her litany began to annoy me, and I didn't want to look in her face, but lifted my eyes up, above her head, and fixed them on the portrait of the one who was responsible for my troubles. "Yes", I thought, "*He is the 'one', the devil himself!*" And with this idea in my mind I pointed my finger to the portrait of Lenin and asked her suddenly, "Why have you hung over your head a portrait of that devil? Do you think that he will bring you happiness? Malevolent spirits have never brought anything good to anybody!"

"What do you mean 'devil'? What are you saying?" she began to worry. "That's a portrait of Lenin!" And almost whispering, she asked me, "Please, for God's sake don't talk so loud."

But I became calmly sarcastic, "My dear Mar'ya Petrovna, try to look carefully on that diabolic image, look very, very carefully. Do you see what is growing there on his forehead? Those are real horns! Yes, real devil's horns!"

She looked at me with eyes wide open and exclaimed, "My God! What are you

saying?! For God's sake, quickly get out of here! You better go!" Then she added in a more reconciliatory voice,

"But don't forget to see Sergey Sergeyevich. I will call him that you are coming."

Of course, I went to see Sergey Sergeyevich, but I didn't find anything that could console me from him. The old teacher, who was now one of the inspectors of *Narobras*, said to me with regret, "This order comes from *Gorpartcom*.<sup>15</sup> It is not a matter for us to decide. But I wouldn't expect anything good following this order."

I returned home. My sister, who was used to my always coming home late, wondered, "Why are you home so early?"

I told her what happened, and we decided not to tell our father. He had been so pale and weak in the past few weeks that we had notified both Igor and Anya to be ready for his death. I told him I would stay home from now on to keep him company and to take care of him, and he accepted my explanation without any questions. In the few weeks after this incident, on February 18, 1929, my father died quietly but in full consciousness. Both Vera and I were at his side when he stopped breathing. We immediately sent telegrams to our sister Anya and our cousin Bonifaty in Taganrog, to our brother Igor in Artyemovsk, and to our aunt Marusya. All of them arrived the next day.

The day before the funeral we placed the body of our father in the dining room area of the room on a bunk bed near the window and decorated the background with houseplants. As was customary at that time, we made a photograph of him lying on his deathbed.

The news about my father's death spread quickly in Nikitovka. Many people came to pay their respects, because he was loved and esteemed by many at the station and in the hamlet, as well as in the surrounding communities. They all came to say the last good bye to him, the one who gave so much to the community—all his former choristers, friends, railroad employees, and his and our mother's former students. Even the professional union of the railroad workers sent their representatives. One of them was a good friend of my father. He told me that when the secretary of the union, a Bolshevik, sent them to represent the organization at the funeral, he told them with cynicism, "Well, well, comrades, the last 'gentleman' of Nikitovka has died." This was because my father had never gotten used to calling people "comrades" and had continued to use the pre-revolutionary expression of calling them *Gospodyn*, which meant Gentleman.

The funeral was on a cold February day. During the funeral procession the men carried his coffin on their shoulders all the way to the cemetery, which was about one kilometer from our house. Since the church had long been closed by the Soviet authorities and we couldn't find any clergyman to have an Orthodox funeral service, the former church choristers decided to make the funeral worthy of the preceptor of the church choir. At home and during the stops made to change the pallbearers, the choristers sang funeral marches and solemn ecclesiastical hymns. At the cemetery, before lowering the coffin, one former elder of the church improvised a requiescat prayer for the repose of the dead, and the choristers sang a requiem hymn. This outpouring of affection moved many to tears, which nobody was hiding. They were tears of sorrow for having lost their teacher and friend, and a nostalgia for a spiritual need they all missed after the closing of the church.

All of us, my sisters Anya and Vera, my brother Igor and I, were so grateful to all the friends of our father for the respect and love they showed to him for the last time. It made us feel that in his life he had touched and influenced the lives of so many people, who would cherish memories of him for many years to come.

The funeral of my father kept me so busy that for a while I didn't have time to think about what had happened to me. But afterwards I began to figure out what lay ahead. Being deprived of civil rights at that time meant also to be deprived of right to work. To find employment here where everybody knew that I was the *lishenyets* was now impossible. I knew that for me there was no solution but to depart from here as soon as possible, cover up my tracks, conceal the information that the authorities here had deprived me of civil rights, and find work somewhere else.

In theory it was an excellent idea, but in practice it was not so simple. Before moving to another place one had to remove oneself from the register of military service and from the register of the teachers' professional union. In both cases I was risking that in my documents the infamous word which would brand me as *lishenyets* would be posted.

Since I was not the only one in this situation, I contacted my friend who was working at the hamlet of Nikitovka in The Hamlet's Soviet office and who knew what others were doing in such cases. He told me, "To try to do something about it locally does not make any sense. Others have tried it without any results. Those who are in power here are all Bolsheviks and are considering all ex-Whites as the 'enemies of the people.' But I would suggest trying to write a letter to Comrade Petrovsky.<sup>16</sup> He is a very important and powerful Bolshevik. I heard that he has helped some people. Try, maybe you are lucky. I will give you his exact address."

I wrote a petition to Comrade Petrovsky, where I explained my situation straightforwardly. I stated that I had indeed been a volunteer in the White Army, but that I considered myself defeated, that I wasn't involved in any anti-Soviet activities, and did not intend to do be in the future. I showed my petition to my friend.

He shook his head in disapproval and suggested, "Add reassurance of your admiration and loyalty toward the Soviet regime."

I rejected the suggested idea with indignation. I asked him, "Are you considering me as some kind of a reptile? I am already slandering myself by writing that I consider myself defeated! In general, it is horrible to write such declarations and to whom?! To the inveterate Bolshevik!"

"Well," answered my friend, "in that case, it is better you don't write anything."

"But what can I do? How can I live from now on? I have to work if I want to eat." My question remained without an answer.

After the death of my father my sister remained without the means to sustain her, and was trying to sell some remaining household items and furnishings to buy food. However, many of my father's friends were sympathetic to our misfortune and promised to get busy in finding her some work. Indeed, one afternoon the head telegrapher came to our home and told Vera to come the next morning to the telegraph office, where he for some time had been acting as a telegraph master. He helped my father during his illness by placing volunteers to substitute for him. He had informed the stationmaster, who had approved that he hires a new person in my father's place. He encouraged Vera, "Don't you worry, we will train you in no time!"

Now that Vera was secure in being employed, I had to start thinking about myself. With my credentials of *lishenyets* I could not return to live with my wife and daughter in the hamlet of Snyezhnoye. I needed time to plan what to do next.

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Katakombnaya Paskha" [in Russian], MS, TS (Ventnor, Isle of Wight, Great Britain, 1955) selected excerpts, trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1992. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Additions as recounted by the author.

2. See the chapter "It's Time To Go!"

3. *Narobras* – acronym for *Otdyel Narodnogo Obrazovaniya* - Office of Popular Education.

4. See the chapter "I Remember My Childhood in Nikitovka."

5. *Gorpromuch* – acronym for *Gorno-Promyshlennoye Uchilishche* - Industrial Mining School.

6. See the chapter "In the Hamlet of Snyezhnoye."

7. See the chapter "Lidka."

8. A small keyboard organ in which the tones are produced by forcing air through metal reeds by means of bellows operated by pedals.

9. See the chapter "Uncle Pavel."

10. See the chapter "White Army Volunteers."

11. See the chapter "Vadim Kuzenko and His Parents."

12. Member of the White Guard, a name coined by the Bolsheviks for anybody who served in the White Army.

13. An individual who is deprived of civil rights.

14. Revolutionary leader of the Bolshevik faction during the Russian Revolution of 1918.

15. *Gorpartcom* – acronym for *Gorodskoy Partyiny Komityet* - The Town's Party's Committee.

16. The authenticity of the name could not be confirmed.

## Easter In The Catacombs

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

After my father's death, in the weeks following delivery of notices about being deprived of civil rights to the selected residents of Nikitovka by the Soviet authorities, my sister Vera came home from the market with troublesome news every day, "They have arrested Kopeykin, and the son of Vasyly Ivanovich... Also Gleb has disappeared..." Each of them like me was a *lishenyets*. From then on when my sister would go to the market she would lock me in the house. But coming home she was bringing more bad news, "Turchyk was arrested, and the son of Valentyna Alexandrovna... Also they have taken Petrenko."<sup>1</sup>

Each day the situation became more troubling. We traced a pattern of arrests and found out that all arrests were done, for some unknown reason, during the day and that those who were arrested were mostly people who had served in the White Army that fought the Reds. We decided that until I made my decision of what I would do next, I would leave the house during the day and come home late at night.

I began to get up very early in the morning, take a piece of bread with me, and walk out of the house when there was not a soul on the streets. I walked far from the hamlet, where there were no people who could recognize me and whom I had started to

mistrust. There, in the midst of fields and meadows that were just starting to awaken from a long winter, between gullies filled with fresh streams, and coppices beginning to awake from the warmth of spring, I passed my time until it began to get dark and only then did I return home. I especially liked to visit a place called Krynychka, which had been a popular place for outings for the hamlet's people in the past.

Krynychka was situated in a wide and deep valley with five steep banks meeting there, and in the bottom was a small lake surrounded by bushes and trees. Some time in the past a little dam had been made from which the overflowing water formed a pleasant sounding waterfall. Here, sitting near the water and listening to its harmonious sounds, I was listening to the music of time, not the present, but the past. I lived there with my memories.

There were other beautiful waterfalls cascading over the steep banks. One of the best was at the last bank where on the stone ledges the murmuring stream broke into thousands of minute sprays as the water splashed to the bottom and formed snow-white foam. The running water and its sounds were endless and calming to my soul.

Above this most beautiful spectacle of nature, almost at the end of one of the banks among the big boulders, ledges, crevices, and gaps was a large slightly inclined plane. There, before the revolution, was a big apiary where the people from all surrounding areas, including our family, purchased honey for the whole winter. I remember going there many times with my father. I saw that it was now abandoned and I ventured to explore what had once been a friendly-looking place.

When I got up there I found that it barely resembled what it used to be. All the beehives had disappeared and tall grass and bushes grew up between the stone slabs, hiding the remaining refuge carved in a stone ledge. I remembered that in the spring and summer the beekeeper had lived here. He had been known to all simply by the name Dyed Korney, or Old Man Korney.

I entered and could still recognize what once had been white walls but were now darkened with the dust of time. Near the window stood a table carved from stone. In the middle of the table used to stand a big bucket with honey for sale. Now there were only some kitchen utensils scattered on it: an old tin tea-pot, a few tea cups, several empty glass jars that probably were used once for storage of honey, a plate and a wooden spoon, all of it intact but covered with a thick layer of dust. Near the table were three benches made from flat stone slabs placed on top of upright stones. On the opposite wall was a primitive stove, also made from carved stones rather than from the commonly used bricks. There Dyed Korney had cooked his meals. Farther away stood a small wooden platform bed where he had slept. Part of this refuge was allotted for keeping the bees during the wintertime and now it was an empty space.

My father had told me the story about what happened to Dyed Korney and his apiary. It happened at dawn early in the spring of 1921 when a Bolshevik detachment from a battalion fighting the banditry came to the apiary and demanded all honey that Dyed Korney could collect from the beehives.

Dyed Korney tried to convince them that this early in the spring one could not collect anything, because there was no honey yet. But the commander of the detachment decided that the old man did not want to give them his honey and started to destroy one beehive after another. To cover up their blunder they shot Dyed Korney in the head right in the middle of his apiary, where he was found after several days. There

was no investigation as there would have been in the old days, and the murderers were never found. The commander in charge of the detachment fighting with the banditry had reported that the bandits destroyed the apiary and killed Dyed Korney. But the people who saw some of the bee stings on the faces and hands of the men from that detachment knew who committed the crime.

Now the tall grass and bushes hid this hideous crime, which the authorities were trying to bury in the past. Knowing this, I thought that this place should be relatively safe while the terrible story was still fresh in the people's minds, especially of those who committed the crime.

Indeed, I passed all my time alone in this quiet place and nobody disturbed me. I would sit or lie in the tall grass listening to the music of spring and think, think and think. Past and present were mixed together, but all I could think was, "How can I find a solution to my situation?" And the situation was becoming more and more complicated, because every night when I returned home, my sister would tell me new cases of people—known and unknown to me—who were either arrested or had disappeared from their homes.

Easter was nearing. These were the last days of the Great Lent. But there was no great anticipation of the holiday as there had been in the past. The churches were closed, the bells were removed. But the people preserved their faith in the Almighty in the depths of their souls.

A few days before Easter Sunday my solitude was interrupted. I was sitting as usual near the water, where its sound did not allow me to hear the carefully placed footsteps. Suddenly somebody touched my shoulder. I was startled and turned to see who it was. In front of me was stood a very old man with a long white beard.

"What are you doing here?" he asked me in Ukrainian.

"I am hiding from the people," I answered straightforward. "Don't you say that! People would not harm you," he replied in a soft voice.

"They have already done so, Grandfather!"

"Maybe you didn't do something right to somebody," he said.

"Who, me?" I wondered.

"Maybe you have done harm to somebody," he insisted.

"Why would I do harm to anybody?" I wondered again.

"Well aren't there many kinds of people in this world? All are different. There are those who are doing only good and there are those who do bad things. That depends on what is written in their destiny," he explained with common folk's wisdom.

"Well, old man, I had no reason to harm anybody. You see, I was treated badly by the authorities." I gave him a clue to my problem.

"That's how it is! You say the authorities? My dear, you think those are the authorities?" he asked me like he knew a better answer to that question.

To which I replied quickly, "Of course they are! If they are sitting in high places and are ruling the country, they are the authorities!"

"My dear young man! What kind of authority is that? I will tell you, there is in this world the authority given by God and then there is the other one imposed by the devil. You see, we had the Emperor Nikolay Alexandrovich, whom God gave the authority to rule. But those... How are they called now, those who took the power from him? It's a sin only to pronounce their name! Well, they are placed here by the devil. Do you

understand?" he explained this complicated idea in very simple terms.

"All this I know very well, old man," I replied.

"Then what else do you need? Just live the rest of your life as a Christian, I mean, as it is written in the Scriptures. Be good to others and love thy neighbor," he preached to me.

"I know this very well," I said, "but what has one to do if they don't let you live? You see, they fired me from my work, and now I have no way to live," I complained.

"My dear young man, you should not sit here and wait, do as it is written in the Scriptures, 'Get away from the evil and create goodwill.' So, you should do the same. Why are you sitting here? Get away from here, because here for you is only evil. You understand?" he continued to teach me his old wisdom.

And I tried to explain to him, "This I also know, old man, but it is not so easy to leave here! You know, we, the young people, are all registered..."

He interrupted me, "In Satan's notebook! I know, I know. But you, my dear, get to them with the Scriptures, and they will flinch away from you! Get to them with the words of God, because they are scared of His words more than anything else!"

"No, old man," I told him in resignation, "you cannot understand me! Are you from the village?"

The old man shook his head and smiled, "Ah, you! It doesn't matter, that you are from the town and are educated, but you think worse than me, the illiterate peasant! My friend, that's just it, I understand you, but I see that you don't understand me. Tell me, my dear, what kind of day is ahead of us?"

"Well, old man, Easter is approaching. But it brings us very little joy," I told him with a forlorn tone in my voice.

But he admonished me, "Don't say such things, my dear, don't take a sin upon your soul. Isn't this a joy, ah, the Easter Sunday? You, educated young man, for you, your own wounds are hurting more than anything else! Christ will be risen on Sunday! And what can be more joyful for people than the resurrection of Christ?"

I understood what the old man was trying to tell me and told him that I sincerely regretted all the bitter things that I had told him.

To this the old man replied in a conciliatory voice, "Well, that's it, my dear. You see, that's why I asked you about it, to know you better. You yourself told me that there is no more joy!

Then he asked, "Well, do you know why I came here?"

"No, Grandfather, I don't know," I answered puzzled by his question.

"Well, how should I tell you this? Our church was shut down," he began to explain and stopped for a moment like he was still not sure if he could trust me.

"I know this," I answered and asked him, "But, what happened to Father Gregory? Where is he now?"

The old man's face brightened up, "Do you know him?"

"Of course, he was my father's friend," I answered proudly.

"Well listen, Father Gregory is working in the coal mines."

"In the coal mines?!" I exclaimed with a surprise.

"He is saving his life for all of us sinners. He doesn't want to leave us, the members of God's flock. He visits us occasionally and performs a church service. Last Sunday was his day off. He should come to consecrate Easter. He would perform the

Easter Sunday service."

The old man paused for a while collecting his thoughts, then explained, "That's why I came here. To prepare this place here, I mean to prepare everything here for this Sunday. You see, the road leading here is forbidden for the Bolsheviks, at least for a while, because they killed our old man here."

I inserted quickly, "I know, Dyed Korney!"

"You mean, you know this, too?" Exclaimed the old man. "Who are you? Tell me!"

When I told him about my family and myself, I felt that he finally did not doubt me, because it turned out that he knew my father and even me, in those days when I was a small boy.

"Well, listen," he told me, "our muzhiks decided to celebrate this Easter the old way. We don't have the church now, but... What you can do? This matter is remediable. The matter is not a building, but the faith of the people. A religious service could be performed anywhere, even under the open sky. But we decided to have it here because everything looks almost like at Calvary, we even have a Gethsemane Garden. We have already notified Father Gregory; he will be here at midnight before Easter Sunday. That's why muzhiks have decided to make everything here, as it should be. To put it all in order and clean it up. And that's why I came here to make a surveillance."

"You have put a lot of thought into planning all this," I approved their ideas. "I can help you, because I have nothing else to do now, I am free as a bird!"

"Then get up," said the old man, "and let's go and see where and what we should do here."

I got up and we went to inspect the wrecked apiary. The old man walked unhurriedly and kept talking, "Here were my beehives... Those bees were God's creatures... What a place it was here! How much honey was collected here!"

Then his reflections became more spiritual as he told them aloud, "And Dyed Korney occupied himself with beekeep-ing for a good reason... Because you see, old people need to devote some time to earn forgiveness of their sins. He would sit here alone with the bees. It is obvious that he could not hold any discussions with them, but in his mind could be clear thoughts like the pure air here. So, the old sinner would sit here, praise God and ask for God's forgiveness for all his sins and transgressions... And the bees were also praying for him. And life for the old man became easier because in this place God himself could see that he was living the righteous life." After a while he added, "Now we have no place to save ourselves at an old age, because, you see, my dear, the comrades don't want us to collect honey!"

"Well, Grandfather, salvation is possible without honey too," I suggested.

"No, young man, you see, a bee is a God's creature. She collects both the honey and the wax in her hive. For men she provides honey, and for God she gives the wax for the candles as a gift. Now can you understand that she does holy work?"

"I understand, but I still believe that salvation could be earned not only at the aviary. Though it is peaceful here and it is true, it invites you to reflect."

Making our way through the tall grass, we came into Dyed Korney's stone house, and the old man's conversation became of a practical nature, "Well, now, let us see what needs to be done up here. We will pray in here; therefore, it needs to be cleaned thoroughly. Let us see what kind of tools we would need: axes, shovels, and brooms. The women shall paint the walls with whitening and will clean up inside. Here, we will

make the altar; here, the right choir; and here, the left choir."

Then he looked outside and commented, "But how could we go with a procession around our church if it is carved in a ledge? Could it be that we will have to climb over that big rock? Somebody could notice us up there. We have to think well ahead of time. The people will gather... everything needs to be all right..." And he added with a smile, "Maybe even some party member shall drop in here. You know, some of them also want to pray to God."

"You mean you have those too?" I asked.

"Well," said the old man, "what can you do with the muzhik who yielded to temptation of having a Bolshevik party membership card, but still remembers God? Of course, their superiors should not notice it. Do you think that faith can be snatched so easily out of one's soul? Although many are party members, they were still christened. So they are trying to get away from their Antichrist. Well, we allow them to come to us, as long as it is done with a pure heart..."

I wondered if this was an exceptional case and bombarded him with questions, "Tell me, old man, did you have such services before? Do the Bolshevik party members always attend them? Does Father Gregory always perform these services?"

"Wait a little, not so fast," he stopped me. "Everything we do is as it should be done by Orthodox Christians. Services are held in the right order. Father Gregory comes when he can, and when he cannot, he sends someone who can perform the service, you know, the monks, who are also in the mines digging coal..."

After a short pause he added, "Well, as far as the party members, those are our stupid muzhiks. They were greedy for what they could get free. As Bolshevik party members they could get all kinds of privileges—they pay lower taxes and they can shop in the party cooperative for all kinds of goods that we mortals have no right to dream about. But they haven't forgotten God and still attend our services."

While the old man was inspecting the apiary and what needed to be done by Saturday night before Easter, he continued to tell me about their secret church, "Of course, we are careful about how we conduct our services. Our church is mobile—one week we gather at Vlasov's house, the next week, at the Potap's, the week after that at somebody else's. That's necessary, so authorities won't notice anything. You know, they are very strict about the secret church services. But what else can we do if muzhik cannot live without prayer? They long to go to church and pray all together."

"But those who are party members," I wondered "don't they betray you?"

"How can they do that without giving themselves away?" he answered with a question.

"Maybe they come to find out who is coming and then report them to the authorities?" I speculated.

The old man admitted, "Well it could also happen that way, we thought about that, too. But we have all kinds of precautions. Not everybody can join our little church. Thank God, until now everything has been all right."

"How do you know what kind of intentions one has who is joining you? Maybe one who has intentions to inform just creeps into your church," I insisted.

"You know even Christ did not escape the betrayal of Judas Iscariot," answered the old man. "And who are we? Of course anything could happen. There are all kinds of men in this world."

"But, if this happens, all of you shall suffer!" I insisted.

But the old man answered calmly and wisely, "Christ suffered for all of us. Why should we be afraid to suffer for ourselves?"

I replied, "The times now are such..."

But he interrupted me, "The times now are like they were for the first Christians. Father Gregory told us how the first believers were tortured and killed. Until now God had preserved us from these kinds of sufferings. And, if it should happen, what can we do? We shall accept those sufferings, as any Christian would for his faith."

Then, suddenly he remembered, "We talk too much! There is a job that has to be done quickly—the holiday is nearing. Every thing needs to be done on time. In the afternoon I will send the *muhi*ks here to clear up the grass. And I will send the women too, to paint the walls with whitening, so we can welcome the Holy Sunday in the bright house..."

This encounter with the old man happened on Thursday and I came every day to give a hand in clearing the place around the house. By Saturday one could not recognize the place. The space in front of the house was cleared up, bushes were cut down grass was pulled out. The broken glass in the windows was replaced, and inside of Dyed Korney's house everything was clean and bright. Opposite the entrance door an altar was erected that was surrounded with greenery; the arch was made out of hand-woven linen cloth, and the right and left choir places were designed on the floor with chalk.

Toward evening the old man came to inspect everything and was pleased with the work. "Well, that's how it should be," he said. "Now we shall celebrate the Holy Easter, as is the custom for all Orthodox Christian people, with prayer and rejoicing together. And, as it should be in Orthodox tradition, all food that each *baba* has prepared will be brought here to be blessed: Easter cakes, *paskhas*<sup>2</sup> and *krashenky*.<sup>3</sup> God did not forget us this year, and we should not forget Him. The time now is such that the man becomes like a beast. Too many now don't think about God."

He looked at me and added, "These are bad times, nobody knows how one will die. You see, Dyed Korney lived here, and he lived here as if in paradise. His time came and he died with a martyr's death. They killed him for no reason at all. Poor man never said one bad word to anybody, but they took his life. And for what reason? Even now the *muzhy*ks remember him and ask themselves, 'Why?' and 'Who?' The authorities should give the answer, but we aren't supposed to question the authorities, you know it yourself."

When the old man was satisfied with the inspection, he said, "Well, now I have to hurry. Father Gregory lives quite far from the village. I have to send a cart for him on time. Then I have to notify some more people about the service. I still have enough to do for today! I need to run to the village." The old man started down at a jog trot toward the road.

I decided to go home while it was still daylight to tell my sister to get ready for the unusual Easter service that was waiting for us. In a half-hour I was home. Though it was hard to find foodstuff, Vera managed to prepare a small *paskha* and make a few colored Easter eggs. She put this and a piece of lard and salt in two small bundles made from napkins, as it was traditional to bring them to be blessed in the church.

Before midnight we quietly came out of the house and went to the road leading to Krynychka. Because we had to walk almost all the way downhill we reached the

improvised church very quickly.

When we came closer, we felt that something unusual was going on. An aureole of faint light was visible in the direction of the apiary, and a restrained sound of voices was mixed with the sound of waterfalls. When we entered the apiary of Dyed Korney, a beautiful pre-Easter view opened up in front of us—the improvised church was shining with candlelight and it was full of people, but most of the praying folks were standing outside. From the church we could hear the voice of Father Gregory, which I recognized right away. He started to bless the food that everybody had brought with them. After that he began the service. My sister and I found a space in the courtyard where we could see some of the inside of the church, hear Father Gregory saying the prayers and the subdued singing of the choir. We abandoned ourselves to the prayers.

Once in a while, the old man who organized this festivity came outside, climbed somewhere up in the dark, and then returned. I found out later that there was an observation post and the old man was making a change of the observers to give everybody a chance to participate in the service. I didn't escape this duty and performed it as best I could, watching carefully in the dark and listening to each suspicious rustle, but, thanks to God, nobody from the authorities knew about our secret Easter service and all went well.

With the sunrise the choir without restraint sounded a powerful "*Khristos voscresye!*"<sup>4</sup> and people with tears in their eyes responded, "*Vo istyenu voskryesye!*"<sup>5</sup> They kissed each other and wished each other the great Holy Day, according to the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Joyful and happy in our hearts, peaceful and contented we returned home with the blessed *paskha*, eggs, lard, and salt. It was indeed a real Easter, though the service was held secretly like that of the early Christians in the catacombs.

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Katakombnaya Paskha" [in Russian] MS, TS, (Ventnor, I. of W., Great Britain, 1955), trans. and ed. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1992. Additions as recounted by the author. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro

2. Special Easter dessert.

3. Decorated Easter eggs [in Ukrainian].

4. The Christ is risen! - Russian Orthodox Easter greetings

5. Indeed He is risen! - Russian Orthodox reply to Easter greetings

## Uncle Pavel

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

After I was deprived of my civil rights and was discharged from my employment at the Seven-Years Trade School in Nikitovka<sup>1</sup>, and shortly before my father's death, we received from my uncle Pavel<sup>2</sup> a very short letter without any details. In it he wrote a conventional phrase notifying my father, "I am alive, in good health and hope the same

is with all of you." This was followed by another carefully worded phrase, "Please write to me, if it is possible for you." And it was signed simply, "Your Pavel." On the envelope was his return address from Vladivostok. It was very surprising for us to receive such a short and simply worded letter from my uncle Pavel, who used to always write such detailed and interesting letters as if they were masterpieces of literature. But we assumed that he probably wanted to be careful for our sake, just in case some of his past could be harmful to us.

My father was very happy to find out that his youngest brother was alive and well, because the last two long letters that we received from him were, one from Manchuria, and another one from Vladivostok at the onset of the civil war. But since then we had not heard any news from him and nobody knew what had happened to him.

Occasionally we guessed with my father that maybe his brother had returned to China, or maybe even emigrated to England, since he had many connections abroad and knew both Chinese and English very well. Sometimes we imagined the worst scenario, that he was arrested as the "enemy of the people," because before the revolution he was in the civil service. He was appointed by the Russian government as an interpreter of the Judicial Court of the Eastern-Chinese Railway, which prosecuted the gangs of Chinese railroad robbers, called *khunkhusy*.

We were thinking, "Maybe they were considered now to be the 'comrades khunkhusy,' or even the revolutionary heroes, who robbed the Imperial railways. Who knows?... Maybe they were fighting for the worldwide revolution and were guided by Lenin himself. Who knows?... After all, it was well known and was not only condoned but also applauded as a heroic deed, that one of the Bolshevik leaders, Dzhugashvily-Stalin himself, robbed the Imperial post office to support the revolution!"

But most of all, we speculated that my uncle Pavel had probably been arrested for his counterrevolutionary activities as a Ukrainian nationalist, whom the Bolsheviks considered to be the enemies of Soviet power. We thought about this because in Uncle Pavel's last letter after the revolution he wrote with many details about himself and about his dreams and expectations for the new, free Ukraine. He wrote that it was one of the reasons for his return to the native land from his residency at the town of Kharbin in Manchuria.

He settled down in Vladivostok, which at that time and for several years thereafter was governed by Whites. He opened a photo studio there and got married. In Vladivostok Uncle Pavel belonged to the Ukrainian government in exile called *Zeleny Klyn*<sup>3</sup>, which was established there. We were not surprised about that, because he always was an outspoken and deep-rooted Ukrainian nationalist and firmly believed in an independent Ukraine. In that letter he was very enthusiastic about the golden opportunity at that time of great confusion in the country for the "quick liberation of Ukraine from Russian domination." This last letter from Vladivostok was full of nationalistic hope for Ukrainian independence and was definitely a great piece of anti-Bolshevik writing.

Soon after I returned from Crimea, my father and I reread all the correspondence from Uncle Pavel while he was in Kharbin and his last letter from Vladivostok. He was a good writer and he shared with us many fascinating episodes from his life and described the exotic places he had been to and seen, and he mailed many postcards from Manchuria with pictures of Chinese art and architecture.

He also wrote about the atrocities of the *khunkhusy*, how they attacked the trains and killed passengers and railroad employees. He described how he assisted as an official interpreter for the Russian government in the trials of the *khunkhusy* and how he had to translate the verdicts of capital punishment to the condemned.

After reading them all, my father and I decided that this was pretty heavy counterrevolutionary material that could be used as evidence if found in our home, and it could put us all in trouble with the new Bolshevik authorities. Therefore we burned all the letters and postcards, leaving only the envelope from the last letter with my uncle's address. We thought that we would sleep better at night by not having this material lying around the house.

When we received Uncle Pavel's short letter, I was surprised and even felt sorry for him that he lost such an opportunity to escape or to remain abroad. But under the latest circumstances in my life his letter came as a rescue. Because of my new stigma of *lishenyets* I could not return to live with my wife and daughter right away. This was probably a God-sent way out to lose one's tracks a long way from home far in the East.

I immediately wrote a letter to my uncle Pavel notifying him about my father's and uncle Pyetr's deaths. And I told him that, because of the unexpected circumstances, I needed to find employment in Vladivostok. My uncle probably understood what kind of "need" it was and wrote me right back, "My dear nephew, yes, you may come here, although you should know that life here is not a mellow-chimed harmony. But people here live no worse than elsewhere in the country and employment is easy to find. However, on your way here you should stop in Novosibirsk at my wife's aunt Anastasia's and try your luck there first. It is closer to home! Write to me from there. Good luck. Uncle Pavel."

My friends suggested that I cross off my name from the military and residence registers by writing as my destination a vague phrase "in search of work," instead of the required exact name of the place where I was going.

I sent a telegram to my wife with our coined phrase for such occasions: "It's time to go. Wait for my new address." Then I prepared my bags, and said "good-bye" to my sister Vera. I decided to depart late in the evening with the last train that would connect to the main rail line going East, and I bought the ticket only to that point. Since my first preoccupation was not to encounter anybody who knew me in Nikitovka, I waited at the far end of the platform and boarded one of the last cars of the train.

As the train started to move, I tried in the semidarkness of the nightlights to find a place to accommodate myself. The car was full of sleeping passengers; the air was heavy and stuffy from tobacco smoke, sweat, and people's breathing. After the fresh air on the station platform, I felt nauseated. One young mother with two small children sleeping beside her on the bench made room for me by pulling their heads onto her knees. I looked at the other bench in the compartment and saw some old, sleeping people dressed in peasant clothing. "It is safe", I thought and, trying not to wake up the children, carefully sat on the bench and put my small bag on my knees.

For long time I couldn't sleep. Thousands of thoughts were coming to my mind. Here I was again running away. The past, like a dark shadow, was running after me; even in the night I could not escape from it, a dark shadow was everywhere. I was thinking that before I reached Vladivostok I had a long journey ahead of me with many changes of trains, waiting for connections, sleeping in railroad station waiting rooms,

and plenty of time to contemplate.

After changing trains to the one going East, I waited impatiently until it crossed the Ural Mountains; then I felt a great relief. I thought, "Siberia is a vast country—they cannot catch me here." And I made the rest of my journey to Novosibirsk like a new man who had suddenly lost a big weight he had been carrying on his shoulders for a long time.

As soon as I arrived at the steps of the home of Aunt Anastasia, she gave me a telegram from my uncle Pavel, stating only: "Wait for my letter." Shortly after, a letter arrived. It was not from my uncle, but from his wife. She was writing straight-forward in plain words: "One night comrades *Gepeushniki*<sup>4</sup> came into our home and grabbed your uncle. Stay put and don't try to come to Vladivostok. I am uncertain myself about my future."

Well, I was not moving, waiting for further instructions. Aunt Anastasia was feeding me. While waiting for further instructions, I found temporary work playing piano to accompany the old silent movie pictures. It didn't pay much, but nobody asked me to register or show any documents.

After several weeks another letter arrived from my uncle's wife. She wrote: "Your uncle received a sentence for ten years of hard labor. His photo studio was seized and declared the property of the state cooperative. I am out of work." Then another letter arrived, where she wrote that my uncle had been deported to Solovky.<sup>5</sup>

Well, in those days Solovky was known as a place where all Whites were deported. And there were stories going around about that place... They were saying that even the climate there was *byelogvardyeisky*<sup>6</sup> and the sea was also called White. And, believe it or not, even the animals were showing their White political convictions, having only white fur—white bears, white rabbits, and white foxes, and some were saying that even the birds had white feathers! It looked like the entire region was populated with the counterrevolutionaries. Only the guards were Red and that was to prevent the birds, animals, and deported humans from organizing their own independent White state.

Finally, I received one more letter in which my uncle's wife wrote that uncle was transferred to the place called Medvezh'ya Gora, that's on the hard land of the Siberian continent. But the most important news was that he was given a promotion—they appointed him a *Lyekpom*<sup>7</sup>, as they were calling a medical assistant.

I started to reason, "Medical Assistant? How could it be? I know very well that Uncle Pavel never had any medical training. At the Institute of Eastern Languages they did not even study human anatomy." And I became full of admiration—how talented my uncle Pavel is. He knows how to play violin and piano; he knows how to sculpt; he can paint beautiful landscapes with oil or watercolor; he wrote and illustrated a booklet about Chinese art, and another about Chinese music; he learned the ancient and modern languages—he has excellent knowledge of English and Chinese and, of course, of his own Russian and Ukrainian. And now it looks like he has suddenly acquired the medical knowledge! God willing, after his ten-year sentence is over, he will have a degree in medicine! You know, ten years is a long term to study a new profession.

Then I thought, "Of course, it shouldn't be too difficult to give medical treatment to the 'enemies of the people.' What could it involve? Maybe the guards beat somebody hard to either break one's legs, or arms, or spine, or to disfigure... Well that's nothing, it could not even be called an illness..."

After some more reasoning about my uncle, I came to a more optimistic conclusion, "Thank God, after all, he is alive, they didn't shoot him. And he is healing the "enemies of the people." And what's more, he provides a helpful hand for the well-being of the unfortunate people, alleviates their suffering, and washes their wounds. One can say that he carries out in every-day life the teachings of Christ..."

Since my move to Vladivostok was now out of the question, it was time for me to move from Novosibirsk. I decided to go back to Ukraine and seek employment somewhere in Donbass,<sup>8</sup> closer to my family. I did miss them very much.

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1. Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.] "Dyadyushka Evlampy," [in Russian] MS, TS, 1951, selected excerpts, trans by Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. [Fictitious names in the original version were used to conceal and protect true identity from NKVD persecutions. Author added more information and directed the editor to change the fictitious names to the real names of the people in the story.] Also previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.] "Dyadyushka Evlampy" [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia* No. 4942 (New York: Rossia Publishing, August 28, 1952). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "Pavel Makarovich Gladky."

3. Green Field.

4. Popular name for GPU agents.

5. Popular name for deportation camps for political prisoners on the Solovetsky Islands.

6. An adjective from the name of White Guard.

7. *Lyekpom* – acronym for *Lyekarsky pomoshchnyk* - medical assistant.

8. Donets Basin region.

## In The Waiting Room

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

On my journey home from Novosibirsk after my unsuccessful attempt to join my uncle Pavel in Vladivostok, I had to wait overnight for a connecting train at one large railroad station.<sup>1</sup> At about ten o'clock that night all the main line trains had passed through and the station was filled with passengers waiting for connections to the branch lines trains. Unfortunately, most of these did not leave till the next morning, so the people already fatigued by a long journey had no other choice but to spend the night in the stuffy railroad station's waiting rooms, sitting wherever they could find a place on hard wooden benches and in uncomfortable positions.

They all hurried to the first or second-class waiting rooms to secure the most comfortable seats. However, after one hour the cleaners arrived to clean the rooms and asked passengers to leave. So they gathered up their belongings and went, grumbling and unwilling, out onto the platform, but there they were also told, "Pass along to the third class waiting room. No one is allowed to remain on the platform."

The enormous third class waiting room was already full of people sleeping or dozing. The noise of the newcomers woke some, but they did not alter their positions. The upper classes passengers examined the room carefully to find somewhere to sit

down, but all the benches were already occupied. Maybe a few managed to squeeze here and there into a small space but the remainder, including me, had to sit on the floor on their luggage. And those who had no luggage to sit on had only a few choices, either to find a spot and sit on the stone floor, or walk up and down all night along the narrow passage between the sleeping people, threading between their arms and legs, or to lean up somewhere against the wall and stand there till morning. But those who at first decided to walk or stand, changed their minds very soon and one by one settled on the floor.

After midnight the room grew quiet. Hanging from the ceiling like some great monster was a huge dirty chandelier covered with cobwebs. Its lamps were extinguished. The light coming from the two small electric lanterns over the empty buffet threw distorted shadows of the chandelier on the ceiling and down the opposite wall. Moths fluttered around the lights and silly flies and maybugs buzzed against the glass. The walls were smoke-soiled and looked almost black giving the whole place a gloomy appearance.

The air was foul and the sound of heavy breathing by several hundred sleeping people was oppressive. In this comfortless place to sleep, one could at times hear a baby crying, or someone groaning, or coughing, or sighing deeply. There was nobody walking in the room. It appeared haunted and depressed, as if the people, driven there by some compulsion and lacking the strength to resist, were subject to a harsh domination by some unseen evil spirit from which there was no escape!

At about two o'clock at night, the light bulbs of the chandelier were lighted. Someone who was aware of the significance of this ill-omened illumination, cautiously opened his eyes and nudged his neighbor as if by accident. In a few moments, this watchfulness was communicated to the whole room. The man lying on the floor next to me pushed with his elbow in my back and I gave a few tugs to my neighbor's coat sleeve. Most kept their eyes shut, but there was a feeling of uneasiness and people were just pretending to sleep expecting something to happen. The heavy breathing and coughing stopped and a strange silence embraced the whole room. All were waiting...

The creaking of the door hinges broke this silence and through barely opened eyelids I could see that a man had entered. He was of medium height, strong, muscular, and clean-shaven. Although it was summer, he wore a long great coat and a peaked service cap with the red band around it. Through my semiclosed eyes I saw the familiar uniform and it flashed in my mind, "A GPU agent!" And I continued to watch him.

He began to walk slowly between the sleeping people staring intently at their faces. Sometimes he stopped and slowly looked around. Under his searching gaze, the inexperienced passenger began to cringe away. The GPU agent looked at him a little longer, then abruptly turned and stared with the same sharp eye at the person next to him. If his searching scrutiny didn't reveal anything in the face of this unfortunate passenger, he moved on, treading noiselessly in his soft boots and glancing ahead. Now and then, he stopped and examined with the same attention the passengers who were keeping their eyes shut; then again he moved forward, threading his way through the people lying on the floor.

Suddenly he stopped not far from the buffet and fixed his eyes on a passenger who was asleep on a bench near there. It appeared that this man was so sound asleep that neither the glare from the unexpectedly lighted chandelier, nor the uneasiness of

the rest of the people had disturbed him, but those sitting close to him could feel how irregular his breathing has become, and how shudders ran through his body. For a few minutes the GPU agent studied this passenger attentively and then touching him on the arm, said very quietly but firmly, "Come with me."

The passenger continued pretending to be asleep, trying to put off the fatal moment, but, feeling a painful grip on his arm, he yawned, opened his eyes. "Follow me," said the GPU agent quietly as before.

The passenger jumped up, red spots appeared on his pallid cheeks. He tried to look as if he did not understand what was happening and asked, "What is the matter?"

The GPU agent repeated, "Follow me."

The passenger dropped his head in resignation and with a feverish look followed the GPU agent toward the exit door.

They had scarcely left the room when the seemingly sleeping people woke up, and began to stir. They opened their eyes, turned towards their neighbors, made some remarks in a low voice, and the same words could be heard on all sides, "They've taken him away!"

In a few minutes the GPU agent returned to the waiting room. The passengers again pretended to be asleep, though now not all of them could conceal their agitation, and the GPU agent had no difficulty seeing through their apparent sleep. But it was obvious that he knew perfectly well from experience that there were probably no politically dangerous suspects among these trembling people, who so obviously were pretending to be asleep. The "enemies of the Soviet state" were to be found amongst those who appeared to be sleeping peacefully and innocently.

Slowly, as before, he was making his way toward the buffet, close to which I was sitting on my suitcase. I was not sleeping. I was watching all the time his movements. Now I was able to see him very close. "Stepan Bolotov", flashed in my mind. For a moment our eyes met. But he quickly moved his eyes away from me, and looking contemptuously at the cowardly ones, allowed his eyes to travel slowly from face to face, till they again rested on the peacefully "sleeping" passenger.

Once again, laying his hand on the arm of the victim he said, "Follow me." The passenger opened his eyes. He appeared to be calm. He even looked with an air of surprise at the man in uniform, who repeated his order.

"What do you want? Here are my documents. You can examine them here."

But the agent insisted, "Follow me. We will check your documents there."

"Very well, I will come," declared the passenger, with a rather threatening look and walked swiftly towards the exit; the GPU agent followed him closely. Just before he reached the door, the passenger suddenly turned around towards the agent and punched him in the face with such force that the agent fell on the floor. The passenger rushed through the door and disappeared into the darkness on the barely illuminated platform.

The room was struck dumb with terror. The GPU agent remained for a few seconds on the stone floor without moving. Then he gradually came to his senses and recovering full consciousness, he remembered what had happened and rising swiftly hurried out.

An oppressive half-hour followed. The people knew that some terrible reaction by the GPU agents was about to happen, because the chandelier was still brightly lighting

the room and outside on the platform hasty steps and shouts could be heard. Passengers exchanged glances and whispered to each other. Some couldn't hide their extreme anxiety. One could feel that people were seeking to find a way of escape. They were greatly agitated and looking for some means to save themselves. But there was nothing they could do. They were trapped in this huge waiting room like animals in a cage.

The creaking of the door warned them of the return of the GPU agents. This time there were several of them. The petrified people didn't pretend to sleep anymore and they watched every move of the agents with strained attention. The GPU agents began checking the documents. No one escaped this ordeal. At four o'clock in the morning, the first of the local trains was due to leave, but none of the passengers was able to travel by it, because the check-up was not completed, and no one was permitted to leave the waiting room. Many of the travelers had to wait another twenty-four hours to catch the next morning's train. As the documents were checked, the passengers were ordered to move to the left or to the right side of the room, and one could only suspect that there was some difference between those who were on the right, because there were fewer of them than those on the left. "Probably they would be checked more thoroughly in the GPU offices," I thought.

By half past four the agents began to hurry and the checking of the documents became selective. Now they did not look inside of all passengers' papers. They inspected the papers of some passengers more attentively and allowed the others just to flash their papers in front of them and asked them only, "Where are you coming from?" or "Where are you going?" And, if they were satisfied with the answer, they directed them to the left and let them through without opening the documents.

When my turn came, I held my military card high above my head and waved my hand very casually almost like teasing the agent, "Here it is, take it and check it!"

The GPU agent looked straight in my eyes and asked, "Where are you going?"

I answered promptly, "Home, to Nikitovka."

The GPU agent did not look at my card, but simply gestured for me to pass to the left side of the room. For some unknown reason, I did not appear suspicious to him.

The GPU agents did not finish their inspection till five o'clock in the morning. About seventy men were on the right side of the room; they were held as suspects and taken to the local GPU prison. I was lucky, I was not among them. I was free. The others were not as fortunate. I heard that after a few months in prison, they were all sent to concentration camps without a trial. In those days such tragic occurrences happened often in the life of ordinary people.

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This episode happen in real life to my wife in the summer of 1934 when she was traveling from the hamlet Kisselyevka to her hometown of Slavyansk. By foot she reached the station of Chistyakovo and from there by train to the station of Ylovayskaya. Regrettably, she had to wait there in the waiting room until morning for the train to Slavyansk. After many years we both worked on writing this story. Her version is included in her memoirs.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhailov, pseud.), "V zalye ozhidanyi" [in Russian], *Vo imya chego?*, 48-49, MS, TS, 1953, trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Also previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (R. Mychnevich, pseud.), "V zalye ozhidany" [in Russian], *zhur. Zhar Ptyza*, 15-16, (San Francisco, May 1954). Also previously published as Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.], "In the Waiting Room," *zhur. Christian Democrat*, (Oxford, Great Britain: Catholic Social Guild, Hinckley Leics: Samuel Walker printers and publishers, December, 1956) 632-635, trans. Kate Hyne, 1955. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Hopak i politechnizatsiya v shkolye," [in Russian], *Nikita Khrushchev v moych vospominaniyach* [Nikita Khrushchev in My Memoirs], MS, TS, (Manchester, CT, 1967), trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## The Last Encounter

*By Orest M. Gladky*

*Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro*

When I arrived<sup>1</sup> from Novosibirsk<sup>2</sup> to the native Ukraine, I decided first to look for work in the town of Taganrog where my sister Anya and my cousin Bonifaty<sup>3</sup> lived. I decided that I would not stop to see my sister Vera in Nikitovka, although I had to travel through it, because it was too dangerous for me to show myself there after I had escaped<sup>4</sup> from there after being declared as a *lishenyets*. Since then, every time I had to travel through the railway station of Nikitovka, I was afraid of being recognized as a White Army volunteer. I was afraid to return to the hamlet where I was born and where I lived during my childhood and my youth and for short periods of time following my return from Crimea after the defeat of the White Army.

Usually, before arriving at the station in Nikitovka, I would climb on the upper sleeping shelf of a car compartment and, turning my face toward the back wall, would pretend that I was asleep. At the station in Nikitovka the trains stood a long time waiting for the connecting train passengers. I was on the alert all the time listening to the voices of the newly arriving passengers. I had only one wish not to encounter anyone who knew my past and me.

The truth is, at the bottom of my soul I wanted to jump out the car and run to the native places, to my father's home, to encounter my sister Vera, my childhood and school friends, my neighbors, and my acquaintances. But I couldn't do this because I was a political outlaw. Anyone who served faithfully and loyally the new Bolshevik regime could have reported on me to the GPU immediately, and I would be arrested on the spot in the railroad car, in the station, on the street, in the market, in the house, or in the store. Such was the law at that time. But I wanted to live free and had to calm down all my desires and quietly lay on the hard sleeping shelf remembering my beautiful past, my childhood and youth passed in this small hamlet.

That's what happened this time when I was traveling to the town of Taganrog. The train was nearing Nikitovka. I climbed to the upper sleeping shelf, turned my face toward the wall, and closed my eyes.

The train stopped. I was listening to the voices of the new passengers and

thinking, "How did it happen that I cannot reveal myself to the people I know?" And the answer was clear as the God's day, "Because I have been byelogvardyeyets!<sup>5</sup> Because I am the enemy of the Bolsheviks! Because I fought against them with the weapons in my hands! Because I went voluntarily into the White Army! Because in this small hamlet everybody knew all about it! Am I remorseful that this happened? No! I was the enemy of the Bolsheviks, remained the same now, and will be the same until the end of my days on this earth. But I want to live and for this reason I have to avoid encounters with all those who know my past."

Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice. My heart trembled, "That's her!" I had to use my willpower to keep myself from jumping down from the sleeping shelf. But I had no doubts in my mind, "It's her, my very trusted, very best, closest friend from my childhood and youth. A friend, from whom I had no secrets, as she ever had anything to hide from me!" Now she was in my car compartment asking the passengers, "Is this place taken?"

Of course, it was her voice! And now inside of me all turned upside down and in my mind I was making arguments with myself, "What should I do? Should I reveal myself to her?" The answer was clear, "Of course! There could not be any doubt! What could have changed in our relationship? Well, we didn't see each other for a few years. So what? If she had a chance to get married during this time, this could not affect our friendship! It was not love that was binding us, but only genuine friendship. And, after all, she was always so nice, so good. She couldn't forget our sincere friendship, the beginning of which I don't even remember, maybe from the time we wore diapers..."

I had the impulse to jump down from the shelf, but... Again the doubts were stopping me, "And if she?... No, no, it is impossible! Why impossible? Well, the times have changed and the people have changed! And how much they had changed! Some of the best became the worst and some of the worst became the best... But she was a white bone and a blue blood... No, no, it is impossible that she had changed!"

The train moved. I couldn't resist anymore and jumped down from the top shelf, "Varya! Is it you?"

Amazed to see me, she looked coldly at me with her blue eyes and I felt something alien and strange in her voice as she asked, "A-a-a... Is it you, Orest?"

"Are you surprised?" I asked.

"Y-e-es... I am surprised." Then she smiled and that something alien and strange that I heard in her voice had passed swiftly and disappeared instantly in her smile. She became friendly and attentive and said to me, "Well, sit down near me. Tell me, how many years, how many winters!"

"Yes, Varya, for quite a long time we haven't seen each other," I agreed. "You probably had time to get married."

"Oh, no!" she replied quickly.

I smiled and jokingly said, "Were you waiting for me?"

"No, no!" she exclaimed and her voice sounded icy and again somewhat alien and strange. But in a while her nicety returned to her and she said, "After all, between us there was nothing more than a friendship. Isn't this true?"

"Of course," I agreed with her, "But I saw that you got scared to see me."

"No, I am not timorous," she replied.

"I know that. But so many changes have taken place."

"In me?" she asked.

"Yes. In you, Varya."

"I have grown up, became smarter," she replied.

"You have never been stupid," I said it as a compliment.

"Do you visit your family often?" she asked suddenly.

"Sometimes," I replied somewhat reluctantly and vaguely.

"I never hear about it when I come to Nikitovka," she said this with the strange tone in her voice, like implying that she should have known it for some reason. Then changing again to her sweet voice she asked me, "Where are you going now?"

"To Taganrog," I answered simply.

"I am going there, too," she said and asked me again, "Are you working there?"

"No, I want to visit my cousin," I told her the truth and asked, "And you?"

"I work there," she replied, "Sometimes I come here to visit my mother." Then she asked again, "And where do you live?"

I faltered because at that time I had no residence and no job, "You see, I am looking for work."

"But you live somewhere?" she insisted.

"In Kharkov," I answered picking by chance the name of the city and felt that I should justify my reason, "You see, I don't like the big city. I want to see how things are now in Taganrog."

"It is a nice town," she said, "I like it."

"I like it, too," I replied, "maybe it is because we studied there." Then I felt the need to change a direction in our conversation and asked her, "By the way, what is in my gymnasium now?"

"In the Alexander the First, the Blessed?" she pronounced its name with irony in her voice. I didn't understand her irony this time. Then she answered proudly, "Now it is a military school."

"And in your Maryinsky Gymnasium?" I asked.

She replied again as if she was pleased with the change of name, "Now it is called a Railway School."

Our conversation stopped short. The questions were becoming too close to the past, which I was reluctant to talk about in the train with all kinds of passengers around us. In my soul I was glad that the silence had set in and was grateful to Varya for her, as it seemed to me, tactfulness. I felt that the old bond of understanding each other's thoughts was still intact.

Until the end of our voyage we occasionally exchanged some empty, short, or monosyllable remarks and, only before arriving at Taganrog, when the liveliness took over all passengers, Varya began to talk about all the changes that happened in town during the time I was not there.

Finally, the train stopped and we walked out to the platform. Varya asked me, "May I visit you?"

"Of course, I will be very happy to see you again," I answered sincerely.

"Then give me your address where you will be staying," she replied, "maybe I will try to see you if I find the time."

"Good," I said. We entered the railway station and I gave her the address of my cousin Bonifaty.

"May I also visit you?" I asked her.

"No, it is inconvenient. I live in a woman's dormitory and don't want any gossips."

We said good-bye. When I exited to Nikolayevsky Street an elegant carriage went by at full speed. It seemed to me that I saw Varya sitting in it. A somewhat unpleasant feeling came over me, but it quickly dissipated. I turned to Gogolevsky Alley and to Petrovsky Street, where I encountered my comrade from gymnasium, *Sashen'ka*, as we called Sasha, whose full name was Alexander, who was hurrying to work. He offered to share with me a bottle of wine that night, "We will remember the good old days!" he said saluting me and ran away.

I spent the day with my cousin Bonifaty. The present was sad and we talked about the old days, which on the background of the Soviet reality were especially beautiful. In the evening I went to visit my friend.

Sashen'ka and I spent the night reminiscing about the days of our youth. With the bottle of wine our conversation was flowing really easy. Besides, in our school days there were no dark and stormy clouds. We parted in the morning when he had to go to work. Only then I mentioned to him about my volunteering in the White Army and the consequences it left on my life.

"Well, let's hope that the dark clouds clear up," he encouraged me at parting, "and, as the night slowly becomes a day, the sky shall become bright and the sun will shine again over you!"

"I hope that we shall see each other again soon." I replied.

I returned to my cousin's home and was surprised to see the confusion, the fear and nervousness that were reigning in his family.

"What happened?" I asked him.

"Are you asking us what happened? Are you crazy! You have let us down!" my cousin exploded in accusations. "To whom did you give our address stating that you are staying here?" Then he ordered me, "For God's sake get out of here immediately!"

"Wait," I said, "please explain to me what happened here."

"What happened?!" exclaimed my cousin. "You have a nerve to ask! Last night the GPU, you know that's the State Political Administration a successor to CheKa, came here to arrest you! They made a search and dug everywhere. They were asking where you were staying overnight."

"What did you tell them?" I asked him.

"I told them that I didn't know."

"Who came?" I asked him again.

"Are you so naive. Don't you know who is coming at night?" replied my cousin angrily.

"Of course I know." I said. "Was also a woman with them?"

"It was not a woman, but a young GPU woman," he corrected.

"Then I know who she is. I trusted her, because she used to be my best friend," I replied feeling guilty. "Forgive me, I didn't intend to bring you such trouble."

"You better hurry—they will come again," he suggested.

"When they come, tell them that I left Taganrog for good, and that you don't know where I am going. Well, I better leave. Good-bye!" And I left my cousin's home in a hurry.

I understood that I had to leave town immediately. I also knew that I would be watched. I was walking and thinking about how to escape from being caught. I knew that it was very unlikely that they would grab me on the street with people around me. I

knew that now, if it was possible, most arrests were done at night. But I was sure that they would definitely begin to follow me as soon as I left my cousin's home. I still had many friends and acquaintances in this town. But how could I dare to go and visit someone now? Of course, I wouldn't.

When I came to Petrovsky Street, I suddenly saw Varya on the corner of the city gardens. This was not a surprise for me, because I was sure that the night visit by the GPU agents to my cousin was the doing of her hands. For this reason this encounter with her was both unpleasant and dangerous.

But I had to hide my apprehension and with an air of a carefree man exclaimed, "Varya, how nice to see you again!"

"Where did you sleep last night?" she asked me without paying attention to my greetings.

In her question I had the confirmation to my suspicions, and the answer came to my mind, "Varya was at my cousin's home last night. Otherwise, how could she know that I stayed overnight at some other place?"

"I was at my friend's place. Why?" I answered with complete unconcern.

She probably believed that I had not yet been to my cousin's home and didn't know that she had been there last night with the other GPU agents, because she changed her way of talking to me, "You see, I came by last evening... I wanted to stay with you for a couple of hours. But I was told that you were not home," she lied to me, confirming again my suspicions.

"Oh," I said almost casually, "I have not been at my cousin's yet. I am sure that he will not forget to tell me about you."

We stopped at the entrance to the city gardens. She asked me, "And now where are you going?"

I didn't answer her question and instead I casually pointed to the building of the former Men's Gymnasium and said to her, "You see, over there I left all that was dear to my heart!"

She obviously was not interested and repeated her question, "Where are you headed now?"

I hesitated to answer her. At that moment a car rolled up, probably the only taxi that was in town, and it stopped very close to us. The taxi driver jumped out, and opening the door of his old car, politely said to me, "I am very sorry to be late. You asked me to bring you to the rail station?"

"Yes, yes!" I replied hastily and instinctively rushed into the car.

I heard Varya's voice asking me again, "Where are you going?!"

"Home! Farewell!" these words I pronounced when the taxi was already rolling on the road.

The taxi driver was driving fast. He told me, "Your cousin Bonifaty asked me to find you and to help you to get out of town."

After turning toward the Railway Square, he continued to speed up without ever slowing down and soon he turned to Gymnasium's Street and then to Chekhovsky's Street. With the same speed he rushed forward in the direction of the harbor, leaving behind waggoners, houses, trees, and pedestrians.

When we reached the Krepost suburb, my savior taxi driver turned into a dead-end lane and stopped. "Do you remember me?" he asked removing his sunglasses.

I answered with surprise, "Sergey, my dear friend! How can I forget you!"

"Do you know who that young woman is?" He pronounced the words "young woman" with sarcasm.

"Yes, she used to be my best friend during my childhood and youth," I said making an emphasis on the words "used to be."

"Before she was a *Chekistka*," he called her by a coined name for a female agent of CheKa," and now she is a GPU agent with a terrible reputation. You have to escape from here as soon as possible-le. You cannot travel on the train now, because she heard me mentioning it. I will bring you to the port. The steamboat will leave in about a half hour to Rostov-on-Don. From there you should find your way out by yourself. But be careful, GPU has their agents everywhere." He started the car and in about ten minutes we were in the port.

"This might be of use to you," he said, giving me a small package. "Remember, you can make only four shots." I didn't want to take it, but my former school friend insisted, "You don't know what will be waiting for you in Rostov. Take it. It's true that it is an old *Buldozhka*," he called it by nickname for a popular old hand gun, "but it can still provide help when needed. Have no doubts it was tested more than once! And now, hurry! Buy the ticket and hide right away in the ship's hold below the lower deck!"

We said "farewell" and in a few minutes I was sitting deep in the ships hold among muzhiks and peasant women, speculators and small thieves, listening to the low hum of human voices. The years of NEP had opened the doors into a new way of life, and everyone who had some initiative was using it to catch up with what they had lost before. That's what my friend the taxi driver told me, too, that he had the only taxi in town and that business was good.

The package was hampering me and made me uncomfortable. I got up and went to the men's room, opened the package, and placed the gun in my pocket. The steamboat lazily moved out of the port. Shortly after we were at sea, something happened with the engines and we traveled slowly the rest of the trip, as if we were on a pleasure cruise. It took a long time to reach the wide mouth of the River Don.

We arrived in the late afternoon at Rostov-on-Don. I cautiously kept myself behind the other passengers who were rushing to disembark. As I was approaching the ship's ladder I instinctively looked around to inspect the pier to see if there were any suspicious figures that could be waiting for me. Most of the pier was packed with passengers waiting to embark. Only a narrow passage enclosed with heavy nautical cord was left for the disembarking passengers. On that side of the pier, at the end of the passage, I saw Varya. She was standing there with one robust young man dressed in the GPU uniform. I understood everything and thought, "My good friend was right. Buldozhka gun might become handy after all."

I began to slowly come down the ladder and, as soon as my feet were on the ground, instead of following the disembarking passengers, I sneaked under the nautical cord on the side leading into town and quickly inserted myself in the crowd of passengers waiting to embark. With difficulty, making my way against the pressure of the human bodies, stumbling against the bags, baskets, and other luggage, I reached the opposite side of the pier. Only then I looked back to the other side, where I had seen Varya with her companion. They were not there anymore and I assumed that they saw me disappear in the crowd and would try to follow me.

I began to run from the pier and turned into the first side street, then turned right into another, and left into the next one, hoping that this unpredictable changing of direction would help me to lose my pursuers. The last turn I made was into a narrow, completely deserted dead-end alley with the back walls of the buildings connected to each other. On both sides there were no windows on the walls and the back doors were locked. By this time I was completely out of breath and was ready to give up running.

As I passed by one of the houses, I saw the back door open and a man dressed in white and wearing a white hat was standing inside the door looking at me with the scared eyes. When I reached him, he called me in Russian with a heavy Armenian accent, "Come here, please. Come quickly, please." I jumped in the open door and the Armenian quickly closed and locked it with the heavy bolt.

I found myself in the back room of an Armenian bakery full of empty flour bags. "Wait here, please," said the Armenian. And in a few seconds he brought for me a white shirt, pants, and a baker's hat. "Please, put the baker's clothes on. quickly," he said. In a few minutes I was in the bakery near the large container and was helping him to mix the dough. He didn't ask me from whom I was running, because in those days anyone knew that a decent looking man could only be running from GPU agents.

I stayed in the bakery for the rest of the day and no one came to look for me. I decided that I would leave the town the next morning. Before going home, the baker gave me a freshly baked loaf of bread and a cup of tea and left me to sleep on the empty flour bags in the back room. Before locking the door he said to me, "Wait here until tomorrow morning."

During the night I had a terrible nightmare. My dream began from the moment I put my feet on the pier. I was not able to escape into the crowd; instead I saw Varya and the big man dressed in the GPU uniform come close to me. She warned me, "You are under arrest." And both of them showed me their new handguns. They didn't search me. Varya was giving me commands, "Go ahead! Don't try to run away!" "Now turn right and walk forward!"

In my dream I was walking and weighing the situation. I knew Varya from her early childhood. She was a dexterous and fast acting girl and probably remained the same. Her companion looked like a bear to me; he appeared to be clumsy, but unusually strong. They had two brand new handguns. And I had only one, a very old *Buldozhka*.

I heard Varya's voice, "Go straight!" Then she commanded again, "Turn left!" I turned into a narrow, completely deserted dead end alley; for some reason it looked very familiar to me, as if I had been there before. The buildings in the alley had the connected back walls and on both sides the back doors were locked and there were no windows. I had a terrible premonition, "This is the end. It must be the dead-end alley were they shoot the enemies of the Bolsheviks."

I continued to walk at the regular pace—I didn't have any place to hurry anyway. And my guards did not press me to go faster. At some point we were walking in a dead-end alley that look familiar to me. From the sound of their steps on the stones of the pavement I estimated that they were not too close to me. I made a few long steps and then, pulling the *Buldozhka* from my pocket, suddenly turned toward my guards and fired the first bullet at Varya and the second at the awkward young man in the GPU uniform. I did it so unexpectedly that they had no time to react. I saw them both falling on the pavement and they didn't move when I rushed to run back.

As I was passing one of the houses I saw a back door open and a man dressed in white, who looked also very familiar to me, was standing inside the door and calling me with a heavy Armenian accent, "Come here, please. Come quickly, please." I jumped in the open door and the Armenian quickly closed and locked it with the heavy bolt. He gave me the white work clothes and put me to work in the bakery.

He confirmed my premonition that the dead-end alley was used to execute the "enemies of the Bolsheviks." He said that at night the gravediggers come there and collect the bodies and take them somewhere to bury.

I was wondering what happened to Varya and her companion. Were they wounded and survived? Or were they dead? If, they were dead, at night would the gravediggers take them and bury them with the "enemies of the Bolsheviks?" I wished that the latter was true.

At that moment I woke up from the sound of the locks on the heavy bakery door. It was very early in the morning. The Armenian baker came in and saluted me. Then he told me, "I will bring you out of town. Help me load the empty flour bags on the cart." When we finished loading, he said, "Climb on the cart and cover yourself with the flour bags. Don't get out until I tell you it is safe."

Very slowly he drew out of town. The cart pulled by the horse did not attract any attention as we traveled on back roads, and nobody stopped us all the way to Bataysk. There the Armenian baker stopped the cart and told me to get out and said that from here it should be safe for me to travel on my own.

I asked, "I don't know how to thank you for saving my life."

He said wisely, "God rewards for the good deeds." And giving me a strong handshake, said, "God, be with you!"

From there I traveled by train to Caucasus to cover my tracks, and then returned to Ukraine.

In the years that followed, I often thought that my dream of killing Varya and the other GPU agent was a symbolic wish of killing all zealous Bolsheviks, all CheKa and GPU agents, and putting an end to my running away from them.

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1. Orest M. Gladky (pseud. O. Mikhaylov) "Poslyednyaya vstryecha" [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia*, no. 6970 (New York: Rossia Publishing,, November 4, 1960), trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1996. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapters "Uncle Pavel" and "In the Waiting Room."

3. See the chapter "Maria Vikentyevna and Yuryevich Family."

4. See the chapter "The Last Gentleman."

5. Former member of the White Guard. Name coined by the Bolsheviks for any person who fought in the White Army during the revolution and civil war in Russia.

## The Dispossessed

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In trying to find somewhere to work, I traveled<sup>1</sup> from Novosibirsk<sup>2</sup> in Siberia to Taganrog<sup>3</sup> on the Azov Sea, where I had an almost tragic outcome to my attempts to look for employment, and then to Caucasus—back and forth through my motherland that for me became a step motherland. I lost the count of how many places I went without success. Finally, I returned to my blessed Ukraine to try my luck once more after many vain attempts! I decided to settle down in the Donetsk region not far from the coalmining hamlet of Snyezhnoye<sup>4</sup> where my wife and daughter lived.

Knowing that there was a shortage of teachers qualified to teach in Ukrainian, I specifically sought employment in the village school. To my surprise, thank God, at last I succeeded—they hired me on the spot. Probably, it was not easy to find a teacher for this godforsaken place because when I applied for a position as a teacher, they didn't even ask for documents about my education or professional credentials; not one question about where I had worked before; nor did they ask about my social-political background, as was usually done in all other places!

The small village school where I was assigned to teach and live was situated on top of a hill in the former landowner's house, which was surrounded by an old apple tree orchard. It was really a cottage, but larger than other cottages on the

farmstead. The outer walls were whitewashed and the small windows had green shutters.

At the bottom of the hill, along the road leading to the village called Bolshoye Kryepinskoye, was the farmstead comprised of thirty-five scattered whitewashed peasants' cottages with thatched roofs and bright-colored shutters. The farmstead belonged to the district of Bolshoye Kryepinskoye of the Donetsk region, and the Soviet authorities had quite recently renamed it Proletarskaya Volya<sup>5</sup>—a name that was completely inappropriate. In fact, it was a mockery to call it by that name because there was not even one really poor peasant and absolutely no proletarians lived there.

From the time I arrived there at the beginning of the school year and to the beginning of winter, I got to know almost everybody who lived in those cottages; or, more truthfully speaking, in all cottages but one. That cottage stood apart from the others. Its tall gates were always bolted and wicket gate locked. I never saw even the shutters being opened in that cottage. One time when I showed some interest in it, the farmsteaders told me secretly that it belonged to the *raskulachenny*<sup>6</sup>. From the way I was told about it, I felt that the *raskulachenny* were like lepers—one shouldn't have contact with them—one could become "contaminated" and be condemned like them. No one spoke openly to me of this; no one warned me. It was my intuition acquired from the experience I had living in those difficult times.

It was almost midnight. I knew that at this hour everyone at the farmstead was asleep. Only I was pacing the room from corner to corner, alone with my thoughts, far away from the school, from the farmstead, and from everything else that surrounded me here. My thoughts were far, far away from the farmstead, from the *raskulachenny*... My thoughts were with my family, with whom until now I hadn't dared to correspond, being afraid to "contaminate" them by being an outlaw... I felt almost like the *raskulachenny* myself... Yes, dispossessed of all that was dear to me.

The worst part of my ordeal had ended only recently. And now I was in a warm room, while outside the walls there was hard December frost. Every now and then I could hear the crackling of tree branches on the old apple trees remaining in the

orchard of the evicted landowner. No matter that my room had an earth floor; that the only table had but three legs and must always stand against the wall so it wouldn't fall down; that the only chair was tied in several places with cord and creaked when I sat down on it; that instead of a bed I had an old door raised on brick supports instead of legs; and that instead of a mattress there were ordinary sacks filled with straw. And no matter that on the kitchen stove I had a rusty old tin teapot, and hanging on the wall a common kerosene lamp. But I was free! And I had hope that soon the hour would come when I could once more see those dear to my heart...

I continued pacing the room with my thoughts far, far away from the farmstead, somewhere in the snowy fields where the slag heaps were piled up in high black terricones, where in the mines work never stopped, even at night. There, in a small hamlet of Snyezhnoye, adjacent to the coal mine, were my loved ones, my dear and near ones, my wife and my small daughter. My tormented heart was longing for them...

In the silence of the night I could not hear a sound from the farmstead; only the frost made its presence felt. I knew that nobody could come at that hour and disturb my peace. My peace? No, my solitude. But, hark! What was that? Someone was creeping about. I could clearly hear a creak of careful steps in the orchard. Who could it be? Who could be coming to see me at that late hour? And why was "someone" so careful about creeping through the snow?

Then I heard a careful knock on my small window. I went into the hall and opened the door without asking who it was. If it was a good person, he would do me no harm. If it was somebody with bad intentions, he could also come at daytime, or now break down the door, and, in any case, I had no means to defend myself...

As I opened the door, a woman wrapped in a warm shawl and wearing a huge *kozhukh* with a turned up collar entered swiftly. When she uncovered her face, I realized that I had never seen her on the farmstead before.

"I came to you," said the woman, who appeared apologetic and confused and was talking in short phrases pausing between them, "You see... I have received a letter... From my husband... I am illiterate..." And she handed me a small postcard covered with many postal seals.

I asked her to sit down. On the postcard were several writings: "*Provereno*," which meant it was passed by the censor. On the stamp the seal was from the town of Kyem<sup>7</sup> in Siberia. So it became clear to me that this was the woman who lived in the cottage that stood alone apart from the others; that she was one of the *raskulachenny*, who was looked upon and avoided as a leper by all the farmsteaders. They were not only afraid to speak to her, but also even to see her, although on the farmstead almost all were interrelated. And for that reason she remained shut up in her cottage because she knew how dangerous it was for anyone to have contact with her.

I turned the postcard to another side. There was some clumsy writing in large letters and in the middle of it was a water spot that made the letters run. The woman explained, "I cried...maybe now you can't make sense of it...you know, that's from my husband..."

"Don't you worry, I will decipher it," I comforted her.

Then leaning on the windowsill, because I had no other chair to sit in, I began to read what was written half in Russian and half in Ukrainian: "Dear ones, I am working up to my knees in a swamp. We cut the trees. I lost all of my teeth. Send me garlic or

onions." There was no room left to write the usual peasant's greetings. Maybe he was not even thinking about it.

The woman's eyes had filled with tears that glittered with the rainbow colors reflecting the light of the kerosene lamp. Those were transparent tears, but I knew how bitter they could be...

"I want to write to him, but I don't know how...I am illiterate," she told me.

"Let me write it for you," I offered.

"But aren't you afraid? You know, we are *raskulchyenny*," she warned me.

"Who would know about it?" I asked her.

"God forbid, I shall not tell anyone!" she answered hurriedly.

"I didn't think about you," I told her, "I was wondering if anyone saw you coming here."

"No! No! I was very careful. That's why I came so late at night when all are asleep. I saw the light in your window..." The poor woman tried to reassure me. And she added, "I want to send him a small parcel..."

"Have you enough to eat yourself?" I asked.

"God is merciful, we are not dying of hunger so far."

"Well, you get it ready and I will help you with the parcel as well," I promised her. "In the meantime, tell me what to write to your husband."

The woman began to tell me the many things she wanted to say to this dearest person. And I did my best to put it in as few words as possible—all that she wanted to tell her dear one. The letter was quickly finished. The woman got up and began to pull out presents from her pockets to pay me for my work. They were some kind of flat cakes made from coarsely ground wheat grain.

"They are not bad...They taste good...we bake them in the ashes...because we are afraid to have fire in the stove...they are really tasty!" she said with reassurance.

"No! No!" I refused and with difficulty persuaded her to take them back.

The unexpected night visitor went away as quietly as she came. And my thoughts returned to agitate me. My wound had opened up again and I felt sharp pain in my heart. The sleepless night awaiting me did not frighten me. I was finding a consolation in my torment.

A few nights later—when the farmstead was already in deep sleep and only I, as usual, was pacing the room and my thoughts were far, far away from everything that was around me at that late hour—again someone tapped in the same cautious way on my little window. I understood that it was the *raskulachyenny* woman. Yes, it was she. This time she brought a small parcel in which she was sending her husband garlic, warm underwear, and some kind of herbs unknown to me. I wrote the address on the parcel, the woman thanked me and quickly went away. She knew very well that if somebody had seen her coming here, I could pay for it with my liberty the same way as her husband. After this visit I didn't see her anymore for several weeks.

One day I was returning from a daily stroll and stopped near the farmstead representative's cottage, where as usual farmsteaders were gathered. They were waiting for him to return from a district office to find out all the news. I listened to the farmsteaders who were discussing the burning topic in those days "collectivization."<sup>8</sup> Suddenly somebody pronounced, "Tymokha<sup>9</sup> is coming!"

All turned their heads in the direction of the road where at the beginning of the

farmstead someone was coming. He was walking in an uneven gait, staggering along the way, making one big step, then stopping, and then continuing the jerky walk. He carried a long stick with which he seemed to measure the road in front of him. When he reached the cottage of the *raskulachenny*, he stopped, turned himself toward it, raised his stick and threatened somebody invisible, then continued to walk toward us.

When he came closer, the farmsteaders got silent. All their attention was now on this man. At that moment I realized that he was a stranger whom I never saw before in the farmstead. He was wearing a half-length sheepskin coat, high hunting boots, and on his head, an old sheepskin hat. He was not old yet, although his face was covered with fine wrinkles, and coarse gray hair was sticking out from his long mustache.

When he came close to the crowd, it seemed that he didn't intend to stop. But then he seemed to change his mind and said with a smile, "Hul-lo, *muzhychky*!"<sup>10</sup>

"Hullo, hullo, Tymofyey Terentyevich!" answered the farmsteaders, vying with each other.

One of them asked, "Are you just returning from a district office, Tymofyey Terentyevich?"

Because of the respectful way the farmsteaders were addressing this man, I understood that he was not an ordinary muzhyk but one who knew what was going on in the farmstead and maybe in a district office.

Meanwhile Tymokha wasn't hurrying in answering the question. Instead he dropped a derisive hint to the crowd, "Well-well-well, *kolchoznyky*"<sup>11</sup>, are you discussing the *raskulachenny* cottage?"

The farmsteaders answered in tune with each other, "What about the cottage?"

"It's the folks who live there!" said one.

"Maybe they are dead from hunger by now!" said another.

"Or frozen to death!" added the third one. "You see, there is no smoke from the chimney to be seen day or night."

Tymokha listened to them with an ironic expression on his face, then ridiculed them profusely, "How clever! They are de-e-ad!" He mocked their words.

The farmsteaders listened to Tymokha in silence. I understood that they were afraid to say the wrong things to him.

"Ha-ha-ha!" he laughed and stated, "They will outlive you all! What kind of tales are you telling me about the *raskulachenny*, you cranks? De-e-ad! Those folks? H-ha-ha! You don't know what Tymokha knows! Their chimney is feeding them, you nitwits! It is like in the old times. One lived, and the other lived till he had food; one barely moved his legs, and the other rode on his back! The people were stupid, didn't know any better. Even today not too many clever ones could be found among you. You are sorry for the *raskulachenny*! You, ignorant folks! You haven't seen enough evil in this world! The time has come now to be-come somebody, but you want to remain the muck worms!"

The farmsteaders still listened, as he continued to preach to them, "*Kulaks* will die anyway. We will see to it!" And Tymokha raised his cane again and made a threatening gesture in the direction of the *raskulachenny* cottage. "Remember, it's me, Tymokha, who is telling you this. Because *kulak* is the first enemy of muzhyk. And you slobber about them! *Mu-u-zhy-y-ky*!" He spoke to them this time with derision about their political ignorance. And Tymokha mockingly imitated them by ridiculing one more time, "It's the folks who live there!...maybe dead from hunger by now!" And then he

added, "Maybe you start sniveling now like women!"

After a short pause he continued, but this time hammering each word distinctly, "You don't know what Tymokha knows. They have enough to guzzle for as long as they live." Then he added with a grin on his face, "But their business is closed now! Tomorrow it will come out where *kulaks* are hiding their wheat. They will get their wheat!...U-u-uh! And *kulak's* children! They will get what they deserve!" Then he cursed.

The farmsteaders stood silent. Tymokha's words reminded them that what would happen tomorrow to the *raskulachenny* could happen to each one of them—because none of them on this farmstead was really poor. When the district authorities ordered to collect the so-called "excess" of grain from all peasants, all of them had hidden their grain, as much and wherever they could.

Tymokha cursed several times, changing with gusto swearing words while threatening again with his raised stick toward the *raskulachenny* cottage. Then, without saluting, he walked toward the farmstead where he lived.

When he walked by me, I smelled vodka on his breath. The farmsteaders told me that he was never completely sober. But he was a very good master—all brick stoves in the neighboring villages and farmsteads were made with his hands. But I couldn't understand his threatening toward the *raskulachenny* cottage and the puzzling comments of the farmsteaders, spoken intermittently, "Tymokha doesn't throw his words on the wind!"

"Yes, he had his hands in that brick stove..."

"Sure, muzhyks, a peasant's stove is a very large construction!"

"If Tymokha talks about wheat, it means that he knows something about it!"

"Y-a-h,...there will be a search."

"If they search, they will find it!"

The following day was Christmas Eve. But, although the farmsteaders were religious, the earthly events of those years moved them farther away from God. And maybe because of that in those troubled days, Christmas holidays were beginning with a general feeling of uneasiness and vague gloomy presentiment of a nearing inevitable misfortune. Though in every cottage there were preparations according to all Orthodox traditions, the approaching big holiday was not felt as usual by the farmsteaders.

That morning, during school hours, my pupils suddenly turned their heads toward the windows, and we saw a sled driving up to the front door of the schoolhouse. The overdriven horses stopped, emitting puffs of steam from their noses. In a few moments the doors were flung open and a man all covered with snow appeared on the threshold and asked me, "Are you the teacher?"

"Yes, I am the teacher," I answered.

"Dismiss the pupils! he ordered me. "Come with me to the farmsteads!"

"Very well," I answered, knowing that to argue with the authorities was senseless.

Once, when I was working in another village, I complained and asked my inspector in the *Narobras*<sup>12</sup> office what to do in the cases when someone from the Soviet authorities came to me and asked me to close the school because they needed to conduct a meeting. His answer was very cumbersome and unclear, "As you know, dear, when the comrades tell you to do something...Time is now like this...you should try to accom-modate all this at your place...I really cannot help you. There is no universal answer to this problem, each situation is different...Dialectically to say it...it depends on

who, how, and for what reason..."

From his answer I understood that the inspector had no power to prevent the use of the school building, or the services of the teachers from the stream of agents empowered by the Soviet authorities. Therefore, I obeyed.

That whole day I spent in the neighboring farmsteads, sometimes acting as a secretary for the meeting conducted by the District Collectivization agent or reading to the farmsteaders propaganda literature about the virtues of the *kolkhoz*.<sup>13</sup>

It was getting dark when we returned to our farmstead. The snowstorm that started in the afternoon was now raging with all its might. The northeasterly wind was blowing pungent snow in our faces. We all were glad to finally get to a warm place, although I knew that my room remained without heating the whole day. One would think that in such weather nobody would drive to this place. But I was wrong.

Our sleds stopped near the farmstead representative's cottage where we almost bumped into the light sleigh that had just arrived with some new visitors. From underneath a white lump of snow one man emerged, followed by another. The first jumped down from the sled, shook the snow from his long sheepskin coat, cursed at the weather, and turned down his high fur collar, disclosing the uniform cap of a GPU agent.

"Well, why are you standing there?" he asked the other one, who appeared to be just an ordinary driver.

Then he shouted to all of us, "Let's go in and get warm!" And he hurriedly ran into the cottage of the farmstead representative. It was obvious that it wasn't the first time he had been here and that he knew who lived in that cottage.

The District Collectivization agent followed the GPU agent into the cottage and I had to follow them, too, as there was still work for me to do. I had to write a polished record of the proceedings of the peasants' meetings by getting rid of all the "useless" negative details that, according to the District Collectivization agent, "were of no interest" to the Bolshevik Party masters.

As we entered the room, the GPU agent was standing near the stove rubbing his frozen hands. He recognized the District Collectivization agent and told him, "Tonight we will evict the Morozovs." I recognized the name. I had written it on the letter and on the parcel that was to be mailed to faraway Kyem.

"Morozovs? Which Morozovs?" asked the farmstead representative in a surprised voice.

"Those *raskulachyenny* whose muzhyk was sent up north. His wife is still here," the GPU agent replied.

"But she has small children and an old mother," remarked the farmstead representative cautiously.

"That's not our business!" the GPU agent answered sharply.

"It's long overdue," commented the district collectivization agent and added, "Look how they make themselves at home here! Degenerate *kulaks*! They are only making trouble influencing the rest of the farmsteaders. That's why muzhyks are fussing about and don't want to go into *kolkhoz*."

"Certainly, it's *kulaks'* propaganda! It is clear, they should have been removed a long time ago!" remarked the GPU agent and then added, addressing the farmstead representative, "We ought to warm up after that cold journey. Haven't you any vodka?"

"Of course, we have!" answered the farmstead representative hurriedly. "For such an occasion we always keep in reserve all that is necessary! We know very well that in this cold winter only vodka could warm you up! Hey, *baba*,<sup>14</sup>" he called bossingly his wife, "hurry up! Don't dawdle up there, put everything on the table at once!"

A one-liter bottle of vodka immediately appeared on the table. The wife of the farmstead representative was used to entertaining such important guests and hurried up with a piece of salted lard, sauerkraut, pickles, and homemade bread. All sat at the table and had a glassful of vodka followed by a light repast. But the GPU agent didn't allow them to indulge in drinking more and ordered in an authoritative manner, "That's enough! Let's go first to the Morozovs!"

All got up and silently began to put on their coats. The district collectivization agent indicated with a gesture that I too should come with them, because all this had to be documented and a report for the authorities had to be written according to the rules.

As we came closer to the *raskulachenny* cottage, Tymokha appeared. It was hard to say when he arrived, but I don't remember having seen him at the farmstead representative's cottage or on the street.

At the knocking at the shutters by the GPU agent, there was no answer for a long time. We all stood silently waiting. The agent knocked again and again. There was silence, as if all the inhabitants were dead and the cottage was empty.

"Knock! Go on, knock!" Tymokha encouraged him, and he himself began to bang on the locked shutters.

In a few minutes the wicket gate squeaked and a woman appeared. I recognized her voice—it was the same woman who had twice come to see me. She didn't see me in the dark. She opened the gate and stepped aside, letting us pass through and then, as a good property owner, carefully closed the wicket gate and hastened to open the cottage door for us.

The cottage, like all peasants' cottages, had two big rooms with the huge stove and a wide chimney wall dividing them. In the first room was a small oil lamp. Its dim, oscillating light was not sufficient and left the room in semidarkness. Even in the poor light one could see very simple furnishings the same as in any other cottage on the farmstead.

Two girls were sitting on the floor. One was about five or six years old, and the other, about two-and-a-half or three. It was difficult to see what they were doing. On a big, high wooden bed an old woman was sitting, knitting something with trembling hands.

After we entered the room, the woman closed the door carefully and stood silently there observing us. Perhaps she recognized me, but she didn't betray me even with the slightest gesture. But most probably, she was confused and scared to see so many men coming into her cottage uninvited. I longed to warn her in some way about the approaching misfortune, but there was no way of doing so. And then, my warning would not help her. It was too late!

"Well, *kulachka*,<sup>15</sup> where you keep your wheat?" asked the GPU agent.

"What wheat?" answered the woman calmly.

"The wheat you have hidden with your husband!" he shouted.

The woman swiftly glanced over the uninvited people and for a moment her eyes rested on Tymokha. It seemed to me that she guessed why

the stove maker was there. But she simply repeated once more, "What wheat?"

"Don't sham! Tell us where it is hidden!" the GPU agent insisted.

This time the woman didn't even answer.

"You!..." the GPU agent abused her with cursing. "Where is the wheat?"

Composed and calm she dared to tell him straightforward, "What can I tell? If you know where it is, there is no reason to ask me, just take it."

The GPU agent came close to the chimney wall and began to tap with his knuckles here and there. The sound changed from one place to another; in a hollow place the sound was clear; in a packed place it was toneless.

Tymokha came closer to the wall and prompted the GPU agent, "Here, comrade, here...right, here!...Hit here, hit! It is here, I am telling you!" He tapped on the wall again and asked, "Don't you hear it?"

The GPU agent saw the hatchet in Tymokha's hand, grabbed it, and started to chip at the brick wall. After a while the brick cracked and from the hole a golden stream of wheat grains started to pour on the earthen floor...

"You!!!!..." The GPU agent discharged several curses on the woman. "You, *kulak's* rogue!"

The others joined the agent in a choir of abuse:

"Here, here, this is how they live, these *kulachky*<sup>16</sup>."

"See, they are hiding themselves!"

However Tymokha's mocking was the most notable, "They don't have any whe-e-at!"

I was observing what was going on in silence. I knew that I was needed only to write a report that the wheat was found here.

And I was needed not only because many agents didn't know how to write, but also because it was an established rule that each party boss and GPU agent would give orders, but he should have some literate person write and rewrite all reports and account for their deeds, eliminating all the ugly details. Only in special political cases where it was not desirable to have witnesses, the GPU agents would write the reports themselves.

The woman still stood silently by the door. She was calm and expressionless, as in a trance; not a muscle moved on her face. Did she anticipate what she and her family would have to endure? Did she realize what terrible thing was to happen at any moment to her, her children, and her old mother? Could she even have guessed what was going to happen? Of course, not. Even I couldn't. She didn't know anything, because nobody could have warned her about it. And why warn her? What could have been changed? Could she have saved herself from a disaster? And if someone had dared to tell her the terrible truth, would he not have become one more unfortunate victim? No, nobody would have risked warning her!

"Get out of here!!!" the GPU agent suddenly bellowed at the woman, so loud that one could not recognize his voice.

The woman opened her eyes wide but asked him as quietly as before, "From where?"

The GPU agent screamed again, "From here! Get out of this cottage! And never set foot here again!"

"Where would we go? It is almost night...there is a snowstorm...and my small

children...," she was talking so softly that one barely could hear her voice.

The brutal GPU agent didn't hear her and didn't want to hear her. He continued to scream at her even louder, "Get out!!! Get out of here!!!"

"My children...my old mother...," was pleading the woman.

"Your whelps are not my business! Get out of here, you carrion! Out! Out! Not even the smell of you should be left here! Out!!! Out!!!" Screamed the GPU agent at the top of his lungs.

The woman again repeated softly and quietly, "Where I would go out of cottage?...Small children...old mother...Where could I go with them?...Where?"

The impatient GPU agent jumped in front of her pointing to the door, "Out!!! Out!!! Out!!!"

The woman dared once more to say, "Where?.."

The enraged GPU agent threatened her with his raised fist. "Shut up! Gather your vile creatures! Or else I will throw them and you out in the snow myself!"

The scared children were looking at their mother. They were so terrified they could not even cry. They could not understand what was going on, but felt that something terrible was happening. The old mother got up from the bed and began to collect the small pieces of wood scattered near the stove in a basket. Even the District Collectivization agent seemed uneasy and went into the other room to observe as the golden fine stream of wheat grain poured out on the floor.

Silently the woman began to dress her children. With shaking hands she tied the knots on their kerchiefs and the leather ties on their sheepskin coats. Then she put on her children's feet small felt boots, got dressed herself, and helped her mother to tie a knot on her kerchief.

While the woman was dressing her children and herself, the furious GPU agent paced around her, swinging his fists near her face and relentlessly abusing her by disgorging blasphemous expletives intended to make her hurry up.

Both the district collectivization agent and the farmstead representative remained in the other room, where they were giving the impression of inspecting the hole in the chimney wall and making comments about the growing pile of wheat grain on the floor. Tymokha stood near the stove and, with obvious pleasure, watched and listened as the GPU agent was abusing the woman.

I had to remain near the table to take notes as instructed. I watched those poor children with pity. I don't know whose heart bled most in pain for them, their mother's or mine. It seemed to me that she still didn't realize all the horrors that awaited her beyond the doors of the cottage. My mind was trying to find some way to help the poor woman, but I knew there was nothing I could do for her, having all those malevolent men around. They represented danger for me as well, as I had just recently endured my own tragic encounter with GPU agents.

When the woman got everybody bundled up, she turned toward the corner—where dark icons covered with soot from the stove smock were hanging—and crossed herself, bowing almost to the ground. Then she got a handful of wheat grain from the bowl on the cupboard and put it in her pocket, looked around on the walls of her cottage, and faintly said, "Farewell..."

As the woman with the small children and old mother walked outside into the snow, everyone followed her in silence. The snowstorm had turned into a blizzard.

Without looking back, the *raskulachyenny* started on the road leading to the railroad station. The steep road going up the hill was now invisible behind the whirling vortexes of snow. The banished quickly disappeared behind the white haze.

For a while we all stood silently near the empty cottage, looking in the direction of the road, though the banished could no longer be seen. Even the GPU agent was suddenly speechless as he was trying to see with strained attention beyond the impenetrable whiteness; he probably was trying to make sure that the woman would not come back. It was hard to guess what kind of thoughts were passing through his criminal mind at that time. Was he thinking about the wasted lives? Was it possible that his heart was reproaching him for the evil that he had done? Maybe he heard his conscience and realized the evil that he had disseminated around him. Or maybe he was planning his next terrible deed. It is hard to understand the heart and soul of an inveterate criminal! I was afraid to even think about it.

Nobody was talking; all were engrossed in their own thoughts, which they did not dare pronounce aloud. Then, finally, the farmstead representative broke the silence by reminding everybody, "To think about it, there are twenty-five miles to the railroad station!"

The GPU agent, trying to be cheerful, commented with irony in his voice, "Let's go, comrades, we shall drink for the 'salvation of their souls.'" Then with a voice in which there was no more anger, as though he had completely forgotten what he had just done, he said, "Let's go to the farmstead representative's house." Now he had a desire only to warm up with a drink of vodka, and he added with the insistence, "Let's go! Let's go! We shall finish what was left in the bottle."

But the GPU agent's indifference was only temporary. After I finished writing his report at the farmstead representative's house and saluted everybody, I heard him say, "The dogs deserve the dogs' death!"

As I was walking toward the school where I lived, all kinds of ideas were going through my mind, "Maybe I could follow the banished family and stop them...and offer them to wait in the school till the blizzard was over?...But how I could find them?...One cannot see the road—it is just one white extension of drifting snow—and the footsteps are covered as soon as one's foot is raised...It's impossible to even find in which direction they were headed...If I try to call them, the sound of my voice would be lost in the whirls of the snowy wind." I felt powerless. There was only hope that the Almighty shows them the road and protects them...

That night I couldn't close my eyes. I was listening to the sounds of wind hoping to hear the light knocking on my windows by the poor woman seeking refuge... I was thinking, "Why was the poor woman so submissive? Why didn't she show to her executioners her tears and her sufferings?...When she came to me with a letter from her husband she did not hide her tears...Why then now didn't she cry and implore the cruel GPU agent at least to remain in the cottage until the blizzard was over? Was she mesmerized by his shouts and abuse, or was she protecting her children from being abused by taking it all upon herself?...Or maybe she realized that nothing could touch the people with the animal hearts. Probably it was the strength of a mother that kept her calm and composed during the ordeal..." I was lying on my bed with my eyes open and had a vision of two crying children and two lamenting women wandering in the blizzard...

The blizzard raged all night. Even the GPU agent and the District Collectivization

agent stayed overnight on the farmstead not departing until early in the morning.

Christmas arrived. Somebody from the neighboring village came to visit their relatives in our farmstead and brought the latest news, which quickly spread on the farmstead, "The frozen bodies of two women and two children were found beyond the village on the side of the road leading to the railroad station.

The two women were lying in the snowdrift next to each other and the mother held the two small girls in her arms as if protecting those little angels... Their faces were so peaceful, like they were asleep... They say that nobody knows who they were because they had no documents on them. And everybody was wondering why they were on the road in that kind of a blizzard."

The cottage of *raskulachenny* stood there with its closed shutters and wide-open wicket gate. It was not hard for the farmsteaders to guess what had happened to their neighbors. But nobody knew for sure, except the three of us, the farmstead representative, Tymokha, and I. But we were not talking. Probably one day Tymokha would spill the truth. He would be drunk and would start to brag in front of the homesteaders about what had happened that night, reassuring them that he was telling the truth, "I am telling you, Tymokha knows!"

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Na khutorye" [in Russian], MS, TS, (Ventnor, Isle of Wight, Great Britain, 1955). Also, Orest M. Gladky (O. Michailov, pseud.) "At the Farm Settlement," MS, TS, trans. K. Hyne, 1953, [For the terrible anniversary of the 25 years existence of the kolkhozes], ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Also previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (R. Chongar, pseud.) "Na khutore" [K strashnomu yubilyeyu - 25-til'etiyu sushchestvovaniya kolkhozov], [in Russian] Newsp *Nasha Strana* [Nuestro Pais]. (Buenos Aires: Semanario Monarquico Ruso, no.254, November 25, 1954) 8-10. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "Uncle Pavel."

3. See the chapter "The Last Encounter."

4. See the chapters "Nikitovka's Last Gentleman" and "My Childhood in the Hamlet of Snyezhnoye."

5. Proletarian Freedom.

6. Dispossessed well-to-do farmer.

7. A town in Siberia where many concentration camps were located.

8. Forced transfer from private to the collective ownership of farmland.

9. Nickname for the name Tymofyey. It is a fictitious name—the true name is not known.

10. Plural and benevolent diminutive of muzhyk.

11. Collective farmers.

12. Narobras – acronym for *Otdyel Narodnogo Obrasovaniya* - The Office of Popular Education.

13. Kolkhoz – acronym for *Kollektivnoye khozyaistvo* - Collective farm.

14. Woman (in Ukrainian).

15. Feminine of word *kulak*.

16. Diminutive and derisive form of name *kulak*.

# Meeting On The Farmstead

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

During the snowy winter of 1930 I was a teacher in a village school<sup>1</sup> on the farmstead "Proletarskaya Volya."<sup>2</sup> One morning when I was in the classroom teaching, a sleigh arrived with the *tovarishch*<sup>3</sup> from the Communist Party district office. He ordered me to stop teaching, to dismiss the pupils, and to send them to call all the farmsteaders for a meeting in the school classroom.

For me it was a déjà vu scenario that I had experienced not long ago when I was teaching in the village of Nizhnyaya Krynka,<sup>4</sup> and it was repeating again at this small farmstead. I had no choice—I had to obey the district authorities if I wanted to keep my position as a teacher.

Everywhere in the countryside it was a common practice to hold meetings organized by the Bolshevik Party district offices in the schools. The teacher, as a literate person, was expected to serve as a secretary and to record the minutes of the meetings, as well as to read the farmers the cheap propaganda pamphlets about the good things that collectivization would bring them. In addition the teacher was forced to "volunteer" to perform a function of the village *agitprop*<sup>5</sup>, about which at that time the Bolshevik Party talked a lot. Yes, the village teachers were expected to "voluntarily" campaign for the *kolkhoz* and they were doing it with the same fervor as the farmers who were forced to "voluntarily" enroll in them.

The concept of "*dobrovolno*," which meant "voluntarily," was used everywhere, and people got used to saying a phrase "*dobrovolno po prinuzhdeniyu*" that meant "voluntarily by coercion." It was a perverted concept, which was applied in all situations where the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government wanted to show that the people were voluntarily doing things they really didn't want to do.

Since the beginning of the campaign for collectivization, the farmers had resisted the idea of organizing the agricultural artels. In the winter of 1930 the impatient Stalin issued an order that all agriculture had to become organized in the collective farms at any cost. All over the country collectivization agents were dispatched from the Bolshevik Party district offices to hold public meetings in the villages and farmsteads. During those meetings the farmers were expected to pass resolutions about the voluntary organization of collective artels, for which the infamous new name of *kolkhoz* was invented.

It was this kind of meeting that had to be held on our small farmstead and the district collectivization agent wanted to be sure that all farmers would attend. He stood near the classroom door and ordered each pupil to call on all their neighbors and tell them to come immediately to school for a meeting. With happy shouting the children ran out of school and on their way home they announced to the inhabitants, "Dyadya!"<sup>6</sup>, "Tyetya!"<sup>7</sup> "Go to the meeting!" "Go to school!"

The news about the arrival of the comrade from a district office spread quickly on the farmstead and, being curious about the news he had to tell, most of the peasants were already on their way to school. At first, the classroom filled with a small audience of local peasants. Later, it filled to capacity with those arriving from the two other

neighboring farmsteads.

A chairman of the meeting—who, as usual, was the farmstead representative—and the comrade from the district office—who was a district collectivization agent—pompously accommodated themselves at the teacher's desk. I placed one of the students' desks sideways near the window and squeezed myself onto the narrow seat ready to take the minutes of the meeting. The chairman opened the meeting by introducing the comrade district collectivization agent who was sent from a district office to make a speech about the organization of the *kolkhoz* and to ensure that the farmers would "voluntarily" vote for it.

The comrade district collectivization agent started his speech by praising the advantages of working in the *kolkhoz*, how to organize it, and about the happiness the peasants could find by working together in the collective farm. But most of all, he was trying to intimidate the farmsteaders and to confuse them. On one side, he was telling them that the membership in the *kolkhoz* was voluntary; then, on the other side, he was implying, "If you try not to volunteer, we, the Bolshevik Party, will show you...the consequences..."

When he finished his speech and sat down, the farmstead representative got up and asked, "Well, citizens-*muzhichky*,<sup>8</sup> do you have any questions?" The farmsteaders were silent. He repeated the question several times, but the audience was silent. Then he tried another question, "Maybe somebody doesn't understand something?" Not one sound in reply. The farmstead representative tried another approach, "Maybe we will wait for a while. Maybe someone will think about some question..." In the classroom was such silence that one could not even hear the breathing of the people packed in the classroom—some sitting and some standing where they could find a spot.

"That's that, citizens; then you all understand about what comrade from the district told you," concluded the farmstead representative, embarrassed by the silence of the audience. Then he added, "This, of course, could be difficult right away. Well, we will wait for a while. You better try to think about it, citizens-*muzhichky*..." And he sat down to consult in a whisper with the district collectivization agent.

After a short consultation he got up and asked again, "Maybe someone would like to make some comments about the speech and we will leave the questions for later?" The farmsteaders had their heads down, looking at the floor. After a long second consultation, the farmstead representative got up and asked, "If you don't ask any questions, does it mean that you have understood everything?" The silence persisted. It seemed that in the room there were only two people, the farmstead representative and the comrade from the district office, who from time to time consulted with each other about the stubborn silence of the farmsteaders.

The farmstead representative got up again and made the concluding statement, "That's it, citizens-*muzhichky*! Well, if you understand everything and don't have any questions, it means we will organize the *kolkhoz*!"

The farmsteaders began to slowly raise their lowered heads and to look at each other, but not one word or a sound was heard. Their faces showed obvious tension; their eyes showed an inner concentration, and their heavy breathing had broken the silence reigning for a long time in the room. But no one was talking.

The farmstead representative continued to talk slowly, "Well, citizens-*muzhichky*, how can I say it so that you would understand this? If it is a common consent, then the

Soviet authorities, of course, welcome it. But if you are against it..." The district collectivization agent did not allow him to finish the sentence by knocking with his fingers on the farmstead representative's back. As the farmstead representative had bent down to listen to the district collectivization agent, in one of the last rows someone's cane fell on the floor making a loud noise. All turned their heads toward the back of the room, but the one who disturbed the silence left the cane lying on the floor.

The farmstead representative again addressed the audience, "Well then, citizens-*muzhycky*, should we write that all of you are for the *kolkhoz*?"

The timid voice of the man in the last row, the one whose cane had fallen on the floor, broke the growing tension in the room, "What's the need to write? These *kolkhoz* are by the order from the authorities..." The audience broke the silence and a low murmur filled the room.

Almost happy to hear the voice of the muzhyk, the district collectivization agent got up and asked in a stern voice, "So, comrades farmers, that's how you all think?"

The same timid voice answered, "Why do you ask us? If these *kolkhoz* are by the order from the authorities, why ask us?"

The farmstead representative hurried to explain the situation in plain words, "You see, citizens-*muzhycky*, this act is meant to be voluntary...it means...that's to say, voluntary by you, citizens-*muzhycky*...it's, to say, that it is for your own discretion..."

The man with the timid voice was silent; he didn't dare answer again. The animation in the room ceased. Everybody understood that the "voluntary" act was such that one could not escape from it, like one cannot escape from death, want it or not; either way one had to perish. And with their silence the farmsteaders were trying to prolong the moment when they had to perish. The silence continued. Only the heavy breathing of the people sounded like a gasping breath of a huge wounded animal. The farmstead representative, who was chairman of the meeting, didn't know what to do next.

The district collectivization agent took over the meeting again and he began to convince the peasants, "Citizen-farmers, the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government are constantly showing their care for your welfare and they want that you, all farmers, should live well like the town-folks; they want that 'in every farmers cottage shall shine the electric light bulb of Illich.'<sup>9</sup> They want to make your work easier with the use of big agricultural machinery, which only *kolkhoz* could purchase, and which you, small individual farmers would never be able to buy. Let's take an example, who among you could purchase a tractor today?

He made a long pause to allow the farmers to answer that question, but all were silent and he answered it himself, "Nobody—it's clear. But, if you are in the *kolkhoz*, you will have a tractor. And if you have a tractor, your work would be much easier than your work now. And in general your life would be much better because there will be neither poor, nor rich, because everything will be distributed according to your work. Each will receive as much as he has contributed of his labor to the common *kolkhoz* workload. In other words, everything will be done with justice and fairness. Now, think well about your life, think about how much the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government care about you..."

"What do you mean, citizen-comrade?" the farmsteaders from the last row couldn't resist. "Who are we, according to you, are we some kind of children, or maybe

crippled? Why does the party and the government have to provide care for us? Like we don't know when to sow the fields and when to harvest? Everything we do, citizen-comrade, goes according to the rules—in the spring we sow the fields; in the summer, we make hay; in the fall, we harvest.

And about not having an electric 'light bulb of Illich,' we are better without it, earlier to bed, earlier to rise, right on time to go to the fields like it should be done by the true farmsteader... As for the tractor, it's the same. Give us, you know, not your care, but our freedom; then even the tractor will come out by itself. What do you think, citizen-comrade, that we muzhyks don't understand the machine? Do you think that all of us muzhyks are stupid? Do you really think that? Ask any one of us farmsteaders who would refuse the machine. All would buy it...but...we are afraid of authorities...because if one could afford to buy a tractor, they would consider him to be the *kulak*.<sup>10</sup> You know, citizen comrade, with the horse it is safer, I mean, on one's mind there is no worry about being deported, you know where..."

The farmsteader stopped for a short while to take a breath and then continued with more conviction, "And about the justice I can tell you, too... You, town-dwellers, maybe don't recognize God, but we, the farmers, think otherwise. There is nobody except God who could give just and fair reward for our farmer's labor. How one treats the soil, so the soil returns to him. If one looks after it well, his threshing floor will be full of grain. If one just pecks with a wooden or small plough, don't expect much reward for it, because God sees everything."

The farmsteaders were listening silently to every word and many were nodding their heads in approval of what muzhyk from one of the last rows in the room was telling. And he didn't stop; he continued to pour out the grievances that he had kept inside for a long time, "As for the human justice and fairness, we know all about it. We were promised many things during the revolution. And now, what has happened to all of them? And telling us that *kolkhoz* is voluntary, this we understand, too—they are ordered by the authorities, and there is no need to ask muzhyks about it. Drive us as a herd into it, because you have the power. We will labor there, too... What else can we do?" His voice broke off as he pronounced his last words and he hopelessly put down his head.

The farmsteaders became excited—all eyes were on the one who had spelled out what was on their minds. They began to express their approval and to tell each other that they agreed with everything their farmstead-neighbor dared to say. They almost forgot about the two officials sitting at the teacher's desk.

While this outpouring of approval was going on, the district collectivization agent was talking with animation to the farmstead representative. Although the farmsteaders could not hear his arguments, one by one they figured out from his gestures that something was not right, and the room fell again into a tense silence, interrupted occasionally by someone's heavy and deep sigh.

Several agonizing minutes went by in this silence until the comrade district collectivization agent got up and addressed the meeting again, "Citizen-farmers, here farmsteader Yepifanov substantially spoke against the Bolshevik Party and against the Soviet government. He himself doesn't want to become a member of *kolkhoz* and by his speech he was agitating the other farmsteaders to follow his example. He was trying to sway from volunteering those who came here with a strong intention to immediately organize the *kolkhoz* and become members of the collective farm where they would

labor together with other farmers.

I just found out from the farmstead representative some compromising facts about farmsteader Yepifanov. Although he himself is not a *kulak*, he keeps company with some of them. His ideas make one think that one of them speaks with his voice. And this 'someone' is a *kulak* who is probably hiding among you; he is the real enemy of the Soviet government and of the Bolshevik Party.

We cannot tolerate this, and we certainly will investigate this. We will find out by any means who among you is conducting anti-Soviet propaganda. You should understand very well that all that citizen Yepifanov said here, all of it is directed against the Soviet authorities and against the Bolshevik Party. And I am warning you, such persons will receive severe punishment for their hostile activities.

Remember that from now on, after this meeting *podkulachnyky*<sup>11</sup>, like Yepifanov, should reconsider what they say, if they don't want to find themselves together with the *kulaks* somewhere far away from this farmstead. The Bolshevik Party will not tolerate private farms. The Bolshevik Party will not tolerate small capitalists in the village because they will pull the rest of the country toward capitalism. This you should understand yourself. For this reason you should vote now. If you are for socialism, then you should vote for the *kolkhoz*. If you are for the private farms, it means you are for capitalism."

Then he turned toward the farmstead representative and ordered, "Comrade Chairman, let's vote!"

The farmstead representative got up and tried his best to explain to the farmsteaders what they would be voting for and against today, "Well, citizens-*muzhychky*, just now comrade from the district office told you everything exactly. Now then, I think...because...I mean...to make it more understandable...to

say it our way, our peasants' way...so it will be little bit more clearer...now then, if one raises a hand he will be for the Soviet government. It means that he should not expect anything bad from the government, because he is its friend. But, if one does not raise a hand, he is against the Soviet government. It means he is its enemy, and he shall blame himself if something bad happens to him. Well then, citizens *muzhychky*, now we all will vote. You ought to raise your hands...we will all raise our hands... That means that nothing bad shall happen to you, to all of us... Do you understand, citizens-*muzhychky*?"

The farmsteaders were silent.

"Well then, I mean, I am voting," stated farmstead representative raising his hand. "Who is for the Soviet government, I mean, for *kolkhoz*? Raise your hands! Hurry up now! Raise your hands! Come on, *muzhychky*, raise your hands!"

Slowly and hesitantly the hands began to rise, but all heads were down. Everyone was afraid to look at his neighbor, like they were all committing some kind of hideous crime that each one wanted to hide from the others...

Although not all raised their hands, the resolution for organizing *kolkhoz* was declared as being accepted unanimously. But the report that was written by me, the secretary of the meeting, contained too many details. I was ordered to rewrite it as it was dictated by the district collectivization agent who was responsible for the results. In the final polished report the comments by the farmsteader Yepifanov were not mentioned; nor were the openly expressed or implied threats by the district

collectivization agent, nor the fear-implying explanations and constant prodding by the farmstead representative. At the end of the report I was ordered to write: "*Kolkhoz* was organized unanimously voluntarily."

The district collectivization agent departed for the district in a wonderful mood.

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Na obshchem sobranyi" [in Russian], MS, TS, (Ventnor, Isle of Wight, Great Britain, February 1955), trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Also published in different form as Orest M. Gladky [R. Mikhnyevich, pseud.], "Na obshchem sobranyi" [in Russian] (K strashnomu yubilyeyu - 25-tiliyeyu sushchestvovaniya kolkhozov) [For the terrible anniversary of the 25 years existence of the kolkhozes], journ. *Zhar Ptyza*, (San Francisco, March 1955). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro

2. See the chapter "The Dispossessed."

3. Comrade.

4. See the chapter "In the Village School."

5. Agitator-propagandist.

6. Uncle, or any man, as used by common people.

7. Aunt, or any woman, as used by common people.

8. A plural of condescending and diminutive of *muzhyk*.

9. According to the slogan by Vladimir Illich Lenin: "In every home shall shine the electric light bulb of Illich."

10. Name coined by the Soviets to the well-to-do farmers to scoff them as the "enemies of the people."

11. *Kulak's* sympathizer.

## Vadim Kuzenko And His Parents

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Vadim and I were friends from childhood<sup>1</sup> through the time we both went as volunteers in the White Army<sup>2</sup> and served in the same Fifth Artillery Battery of the Drozdovsky Division. We lost contact when I had a contusion in my leg and was transferred to the artillery transport. While the Budyenny Cavalry encircled the transport, I escaped and on my own crossed the Chongarsky Bridge to Crimea<sup>3</sup>; after recovery in Dzhankoy hospital I walked slowly south. Vadim, who remained with the artillery column, was lucky to catch the train, to reach the south shore on time, and to embark in Sevastopol on one of the last ships evacuating the escaping Whites abroad. I found out about what happened to Vadim much later.

Vadim's mother, Mar'ya Nykolayevna Kuzenko, for a long time was a good friend of my mother and she had visited her very often. Mar'ya Nikolayevna used to be a plump woman with a very dignified appearance. She had a large face with rather rough features, but she had a charming deep-chested voice. And she impressed everybody mostly with a gentleness and sincerity of character. She was always favored by men who, without hiding their delight, liked to put their lips to her white plump hand in saluting her.

As a young woman she used to sing. Her contralto voice was very suitable to

sing Gypsy romances and she received well-deserved applause from the public during concerts.

After her marriage, which was not very successful, she remained socially as she was before, a very pleasant lady, but she abandoned her singing and dedicated her life to the upbringing of her only son Vadim whom she called *Vadyk*.<sup>4</sup>

Vadim's father, Yelisyey Ivanovich Kuzenko, was a railway official who occasionally substituted for the assistant station-master and had a small business as an auctioneer of coalmines. He liked to play cards and indulged in womanizing and drinking good wine. It was hard to pinpoint which one of these three vices had priority in his life, but he was rarely home. If he was not busy with his duties on the railroad, he was either driving in his automobile—usually with his female companions—to the mines to take care of his business matters, or taking part in some kind of meeting or conference, or indulging in drinking bouts surrounded by the fancy women.

When after two years of absence I finally returned home to Nikitovka, I found many changes there. Those changes also happened to the parents of Vadim. Mar'ya Nikolayevna, though trying to maintain her previous dignity, had a face considerably pinched with a shadow of sadness and concern about her only son, from whom she had only a few lines now and then from Paris, France.

She often invited me to visit her and was able to listen for hours as I recounted about my and Vadim's life at the front. Surprisingly for me, I never found Yelisyey Ivanovich home, though his business matters should have been completely stopped, since the coalmines were taken by the Bolsheviks, and his drinking bouts ended, because it was hard to find even a bread in the market! And most of the members of the business society he dealt with had evacuated with the White Army and probably were already somewhere abroad.

For a while Yelisyey Ivanovich had kept his railroad employment because he had expertise in his field and was a valuable asset to the new railway administration. But he knew very well that as soon as possible he should move far from here where everybody knew him. He knew that his membership in a society of auctioneers and his son's record as a volunteer in the White Army didn't give him a very good reputation in the eyes of the new Soviet workers-and-peasants authorities, and that one day he might disappear in the GPU cellars.

For this reason he secretly petitioned for a transfer to another railroad station. Finally his efforts paid off and he and his wife moved to Taganrog.

For some time the whereabouts of the Kuzenko family were not known to me. In 1929, when I was taking care of my dying father, we suddenly had a visit from Yelisyey Ivanovich, who recounted what had happened to himself, his wife and his son Vadim.

At the time of his visit he was returning home after being summoned to appear immediately before the GPU of Odessa<sup>5</sup> to testify during the investigation of his son. It turned out that Vadim, with a small group of foolhardy fellows, all former White Army volunteers, bought a motorboat in Bulgaria and set off in the Black Sea for the homeland. The border guard of the GPU caught them before they reached land, brought them to Odessa, and put them in the cellars of the city's GPU. The relatives of the *vosvrashchentsy*<sup>6</sup> were summoned and interrogated, but they were not allowed to see the prisoners.

Yelisyey Ivanovich was very upset and told us, "This incident in the life of the

Kuzenko family could not pass by without tragic consequences. I am not stupid. I understand that my career on the railway is over and that my days of freedom are running out. When I return home, I will buy a small *dacha*<sup>7</sup> in the country and move there with Mar'ya Nikolayevna. This will be my last deed of taking care of my wife's welfare." And Yelisyey Ivanovich concluded, "Because now I can expect any day that the GPU agents will be knock-ing at my door..." That was the last time I saw him.

Several years later I encountered one of mine and Vadim's friends from Nikitovka who updated me on what happened to Kuzenko family. He told me that he encountered Mar'ya Nikolayevna several times at a *tolkuchka*<sup>8</sup> where she was selling her last possessions. In the beginning she was glad to see him and talk about Vadim and Yelisyey Ivanovich and about the hard times she had living alone.

She told him that shortly after Yelisyey Ivanovich returned from Odessa, he was arrested and deported somewhere near the town of Tomsk<sup>9</sup> for three years of hard labor. However, Yelisyey Ivanovich had not survived the rigors of life in the concentration camp and in the second year he died.

Vadim and his audacious friends were held for several months in the GPU cellars. Then suddenly there was an order—that was even publicized in the newspapers for some kind of propaganda purposes—to send the *vosvrashchentsy* back abroad the same way they came, in their own motorboat. But what was not stated in the newspapers was that before their departure, the GPU agents damaged the motor on their boat. Then they brought the prisoners to the open sea and left them during the night to their destiny, probably hoping that they would not survive. But the "humanitarian" deed of the Bolsheviks worked in favor of the young *vosvrashchentsy*; their destiny brought them back to the Bulgarian shores. Vadim had returned to Paris and was able through the underground mail to communicate this to his mother.

After the arrest of her husband, Mar'ya Nikolayevna remained not only in complete solitude, but also without means of subsistence because Yelisyey Ivanovich, notwithstanding his shrewdness, did not consider that her being a wife of a political convict would prevent her from finding work.

At first, she was selling her jewelry preserved almost by a miracle, and she lived off it for some time. Then she started to sell her old furniture, which was of good quality, but it was not easy to sell in those days unless she sold it so cheap, that it was almost giving it away. Then she took her husband's suits and her dresses to the market. And finally came a moment that there was nothing more she could sell except the country cottage—and that's what she did and moved to a town where she hoped to find some kind of work.

In town, she had no luck; everywhere they were asking, "Where is your husband?" and "Who was your husband before the revolution?" And after finding out that he was in Siberia, or that he was an official of the railways, they would answer her, "We don't hire 'enemies of the people' or their wives!"

She found a small room to rent and was living on the money left from selling the cottage. When that money started to run out and she became scared to remain on the street, a hard time came for Mar'ya Nikolayevna to look for a way out of her hopeless situation. For her there remained three solutions: end her life by suicide, start begging, or survive by stealing. A tiny hope to see her son one day kept her from the idea of suicide. Then there were the other two solutions...

My friend told me, "As the time went by, Mar'ya Nikolayevna steered clear of me and seemed really to avoid meeting me."

I suggested to my friend, "Maybe she did not want to put you in danger by having contact with the wife of the 'enemy of the people.'"

"That's possible, very possible," he answered. "Anyway, let me finish her story," he said.

"One day early in the morning, my brother and I were hur-rying to the store where, as we heard the day before, they would be having whatever they *dayut*,<sup>10</sup> and where we might stand in line and hope that our turn came before they closed the store or ran out of merchandise."

"I know what you mean—standing in line all day long and returning home empty-handed," I commented.

"As we walked on one of the side streets while taking a shortcut to the center of town," my friend continued, "we were surprised to hear so early in the morning the loud and exciting screams of a crowd walking toward us in the middle of a dusty street. As they came closer to us, we could see better what was going on and hear the sharp and gross expressions coming from the procession." And my friend described to me the following horrible scene that he witnessed.

Up front walked several men and women who were holding firmly the naked arms of an elderly looking woman who already had signs of being tattered by the crowd. Her long hair was disheveled, clothes were torn, and her bosom was naked. Wide-open eyes were looking with terror somewhere ahead and her face was wet with tears. Both face and breasts were blue from the received blows and in some places the blood was dripping from the wounds.

The people who were holding her were pulling with such a force that it seemed they wanted to tear her body into pieces. Those who were behind pulled her hair and banged on her back and head with sticks. The unfortunate woman looked as if she was losing her consciousness, and she dropped her head on the chest. Her legs were giving way under her, but she couldn't fall because those who were holding her were pulling her by the arms even harder.

Occasionally some men and women would jump out of the crowd in front of the woman, make faces and spit at her, or strike her in the face, pinch her breasts. Some women dared to pull their skirts up and show her their naked behinds. From the crowd came infuriated screams, "Thief! ...Thief!" Vile abuse and bad language from the men and women were accompanied their wild jumping up and down.

The horror-stricken woman's eyes filled with tears; she could not even see the road beneath her and she was groaning, "O-o-kh!... O-o-kh!...O-o-kh!...Forgive me...forgive me, good people!...O-o-kh!..."

Suddenly one man jumped out from the crowd, grabbed a broken large metal pot lying on one side of the street, and pushed it on the head of the unfortunate woman. The crowd went into a rage; it hooted and whistled and roared with laughter. Somebody from be-hind hit the pot with a heavy stick. The victim vacillated and started slowly to descend to the ground. Those who were holding her let her go and her body fell heavily on the dusty road. The metal pot hit the ground with a hollow rumble and rolled away. The crowd stopped and stood still and silent for a while and, after realizing what happened, quickly melted away in the narrow side streets.

"When we came closer to the victim," said my friend, "and saw the disfigured woman's face covered with dust and those im-moblie big eyes staring like asking forgiveness, I suddenly recognized that the woman was Mar'ya Nikolayevna Kuzenko!"

"Poor woman!" I exclaimed. "She made an easy choice to survive...and a tragic way to die..."

After a long silence my friend added, "We stood there for a while stunned from the surprise. Then it dawned on us, she is dead and we cannot help her anymore. It is better for us not to get involved in this tragic story of the mob's triumph when the GPU arrives! And we hurriedly walked away."

And I repeated with sorrow, "Poor Mar'ya Nikolayevna...what a tragic way to die..."

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "*Pravosudiye tolpy*" [in Russian] MS, TS (Ventnor, I. of W., Great Britain, 1954), trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Additional information and change of the fictional names to the real names by the author.

2. See the chapter "White Army Volunteers."

3. See the chapter "Nata."

4. Nickname for the name Vadim.

5. Large city and port on the shore of the Black Sea in southern Ukraine.

6. Name given by the soviets to persons returning from abroad after having escaped from the Reds during the revolution and the civil war.

7. Cottage.

8. Flea market.

9. Old town in Siberia, northeast of Novosibirsk.

10. "Give out," a common expression meaning that the state store is selling something that is usually not available on their shelves.



## **Part Six**

# **Years Of Stalin's Dictatorship**



# Anna Gavriyllovna Berezhnaya

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

My sister Anna, whom we all called Nyusya, was one year younger than I. She was born on September 8, 1886 in Slavyansk, Kharkovsky province. Being only one year apart, besides being sisters we were also very good friends. We attended the same gymnasium and had many common friends who lived not far from us. Nyusya was an above average student but she had one weakness, she didn't like to do her homework in mathematics, and she used to ask our father to help her solve the problems. My father, who never attended school and learned all he knew from his former master tailor, patiently helped her with common sense reasoning and directed her toward the solution of the problem by herself. But most of the time she was able to make my father solve the problem and give her the answer.

I always remember Nyusya as a lively and cheerful girl, bubbling with life. She loved to listen to me imitate all kinds of foreign languages. I remember that one time in our town many Chinese men came who sold door-to-door silk fabrics that they called *Che-su-cha*. They used to carry big bags on their backs with their merchandise and, when invited into the house, would display on the table all the fabrics. They spoke broken Russian with such a funny Chinese accent that we children could not keep from laughing. In the evening, when we would sit with Nyusya on the bench outside of our gate, I used to entertain her and would say, "I have already learned to speak Chinese." She would ask me to show how well I could talk. And I would start to babble, imitating the Chinese accent. Nyusya would laugh and laugh, and ask me to talk again and again, sometimes until she would wet her panties from laughing.

By the time she was in the last year of gymnasium Nyusya already had a goal of becoming an eye doctor. She told me, "I saw how much you suffered with your eyes and want to learn how to heal such diseases." After she graduated from gymnasium, neither the revolution nor the civil war had interfered with her goal and, as soon as it was possible, she enrolled in the Kharkovsky Medical Institute. Until our brother Kolya was employed and lived with his family in Kharkov, he gave her a room to stay in. Later, our father helped her pay for her room and living expenses.

When Nyusya was in the third year of her studies she had an unexpected visit. A Jewish girl by the name of Mishkind, whom she had barely known in Slavyansk, arrived in Kharkov to attend Kharkovsky Medical Institute. She had Nyusya's address and, arriving right from the railroad station, barged into her room and asked to stay there. She said, "Until I can find a place to stay that I can afford to pay for." Nyusya's room was very small and there was no way to put in another bed for Mishkind, who had to sleep on a trunk. Days passed by, but the uninvited roommate was not moving out, was not paying her share of a rent, and was not even mentioning that she was trying to find a room for herself.

At that time the administration of the institute was in the process of rechecking

the social status of the students' parents. There were strict instructions from the Commissariat of People's Education to expel from the institutions of higher education those students, whose parents before the revolution had belonged to the social classes coined by the Bolsheviks as "enemies of the people," "blood-suckers" and "exploiters of the workers and poor peasants." This category included nobility, landowners, rich bourgeois, clergy, police, military officers, merchants, well-to-do peasants called *kulaks*, and many others.

One day Nyusya was summoned to the Institute's office and was accused of not reporting the true social status of her father on her application. They told her that they had a complaint from one of the students, who reported that Nyusya's father was a rich bourgeois and a shop owner before the revolution. Nyusya denied these accusations, saying that in her application she reported the truth that her father was a tailor. But the administration told Nyusya that they had a witness and that they were expelling her from the institute.

In desperation Nyusya went to the Kharkovsky Commissariat of People's Education to complain about this injustice. She was admitted to the office of comrade Yan, a Latvian communist, who at that time was a Commissar of People's Education in the city of Kharkov. He was very patient in listening to Nyusya's complaint and told her that, if what she was telling was the truth, she should go home to Slavyansk and bring back to his office a certificate about her father's pre-revolutionary social status issued by the Town's Soviet.

Nyusya suspected right away that her roommate was the one who reported her, so she could have the room for herself. She decided not to mention anything to her about all of this and went immediately to Slavyansk.

In Slavyansk our father had a very good customer who worked in the Town's Soviet office. He made for Nyusya a special certificate to be presented to the institute. It stated that all his life Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy had been a tailor, who worked from his home, and that he had never been a shopkeeper. Of course he didn't mention that he was a *lishenyets*.

Nyusya returned to Kharkov and found her roommate already sleeping in her bed and obviously extremely surprised at seeing her back. This confirmed Nyusya's suspicion that she was the one who had caused her all this trouble. But Nyusya decided to wait until she was officially reinstated before throwing Mishkind out of her room.

With the certificate in her hand, Nyusya returned to the office of Commissar Ryapo, who accepted her with lots of compliments. He immediately gave an order to his secretary to write a reprimand letter to the Director of Kharkovsky Medical Institute for acting hastily without trying to investigate the complaint of the student Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya. And he ordered them to reinstate her immediately as a student with all her rights on the basis of the Slavyansk's Town Soviet certificate. At the end of the meeting with Nyusya, Commissar Ian Ryapo invited her to celebrate her victory in an exclusive club for high-ranking Communists in the city.

Nyusya was a very attractive and healthy-looking young woman. She had naturally wavy blond hair of a darker shade and her gray eyes were always smiling. She paid great attention to her appearance, used a light, almost imperceptible makeup, and knew how to dress simply but elegantly. All this was complemented by her good manners and a personality full of life. Commissar Ryapo could not fail to notice

Nyusya's gratitude and admiration for him after he helped her to win her cause with the institute's administration.

Commissar Ryapo at that time was in his early forties. He was more than average height, solidly built, and a good-looking man. But what attracted Nyusya most of all was that he was a mature, assertive, and self-confident person, those traits that she had not encountered yet in the young and impulsive men her own age. She quickly found that he was married, had a family and children, but, nonetheless, she allowed him to court her for some time. Nyusya fell in love with him and believed that he also loved her sincerely too, and she hoped that one day would come when he would leave his wife and family and marry her.

Commissar Ryapo found Nyusya an apartment and furnished it with good quality furniture. There, he could come to visit her with reasonable discretion. This relationship continued almost to the end of her last year in the institute. Then suddenly he stopped visiting her. Not knowing what happened to him, Nyusya was very preoccupied. She went to his office and found out that he was seriously ill, but was at home, not in a hospital. During this time Nyusya also discovered she was pregnant. This gave her more courage to face his wife and she decided at any cost to visit her lover at his apartment.

His wife did let Nyusya in. From her calm, composed, and restrained greetings, Nyusya deducted that she knew, or maybe suspected, who she was. Ryapo's wife accompanied Nyusya to the bedroom where her husband was resting in bed and excused herself leaving them alone.

Nyusya saw that he was recovering well and decided that it would not be damaging to his health to tell him about her pregnancy. Ian Ryapo didn't show any signs of being upset or unhappy with this news; in fact, he became sentimental about it and kissed Nyusya's hand. However, at the end of her visit, he told her that she should not expect him to leave his wife and children, because he would never do that, but he reassured her that he would recognize the paternity of the child and would help her financially now and in the future. Their relationship culminated with the happy event of the birth of their son, whom Nyusya named Vitaly, and Ian Ryapo recognized him as his son. This happened shortly before Nyusya's graduation from Kharkovsky Medical Institute.

After graduation Nyusya was appointed as an eye doctor in the new hospital in the rapidly growing coal miners' hamlet of Snyezhnoye in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

## In The Hamlet Of Snyezhnoye

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Orest M. Gladky and Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

During the race for the industrialization of the country, the industry required higher production of coal. Large numbers of coal miners were recruited from other regions of the Soviet Union. Some of these migrant workers came alone, leaving their

families wherever their home was, but many others brought their families with them. New additions to the hamlet were built at an accelerated speed to provide housing for this large number of urgently recruited coal miners and employees.

The hamlet of Snyezhnoye was located in the Donbass region of the Ukraine. It was built to house miners and employees of the Coal Mine Number Ten. It was unofficially called at that time the Mine Amerikanka because it was built by American engineers. It was located up the hill from the big old village, also called Snyezhnoye.

The coal miners and other laborers were housed not too far from the mine in the quickly built barracks—low and long simple wooden structures with very small windows. Inside of each barrack was a row of long tables and benches for all residents to use. Between the tables several cast iron stoves were installed with the pipes going outside the roof. These provided heat during the cold weather, a place for boiling water for tea, and for keeping food warm at mealtime. On both sides of the tables along the outer walls, the space was divided with thin wooden board walls into small cubicles with just enough space for bunk beds to sleep either one family or several men or women, and shelves to keep their belongings.

There was one communal kitchen with several coal-burning stoves, tables, and a big wooden barrel for drinking water. Several smaller pails for collecting dirty water and garbage stood on the floor and were emptied outside in the garbage pit that was dug near a big communal wooden outhouse. Outhouse was divided in half, one side for men, and the other for women. The lavatory located next to the kitchen was also divided in half, and a cast iron stove provided heat and a place to warm the water that was stored in the big wooden barrel. There, the tired miners would wash themselves in the metal washbasins and pour the dirty water in the pails to discard outside. The women's lavatory was also used for bathing children and for washing clothes. The water-carrier delivered water daily in the big wooden barrel driven by a horse.

Farther from the mine—near the wheat fields of the neighboring village of Snyezhnoye—another part of the hamlet was built for the selected class of people—communist party bosses, supervisors, engineers, technicians, doctors, nurses, bookkeepers, white collar and miners' cooperative employees.

This part of the hamlet had several rows of one-story brick duplexes, with others in the various phases of construction. To speed up the availability of the living quarters for the rapidly growing population of this part of the hamlet, plumbing was left to be done at a later indefinite date. And, although each apartment had a small room intended at some times to become a lavatory, wooden outhouses were built outside next to the sheds for storage of wood and coal. Behind the outhouses were open shallow pits for discarding garbage.

The water for this part of the hamlet was also delivered several times a week in a big wooden water-carrier's barrel driven by a horse, and each family filled as many buckets as they needed for drinking, cooking, bathing, and washing clothes. All these tasks were done in the kitchen, where the water could be warmed on the brick kitchen stove; the warm air from the oven provided a comfortable temperature for bathing in the winter. The same oblong, zinc-coated iron washbasin was used for bathing and washing clothes.

Nyusya moved to the hamlet of Snyezhnoye with her baby son, whom she nicknamed Talyk. As a doctor, she received from the mine administration an apartment

in a duplex house with two bedrooms, a kitchen, a hall, and a covered porch. She shipped by rail from Kharkov all furniture from her apartment furnished by Yan Ryapo. By the standard of those days, she had a beautifully made, high quality wood bedroom set, which included an armoire with mirrored door, a chest of drawers, and a large bed made of enameled metal tubing decorated with shiny brass balls. Talyk had a nice child's bed with sliding sides. Nyusya's bed was covered with a white brocade bedspread, and on top of it were large down pillows covered with pillowcases finely embroidered by her sister Tanya. On a wall over Talyk's bed there was a multicolored appliquéd wall hanging with a winged gnome, butterflies, red mushrooms, flowers, and grass. The airy lace curtains on the windows added to the elegance of this large bedroom and revealed Nyusya's refined taste.

To help her with the baby during the day, she found a woman who worked on the second shift in the hospital. In exchange for her services, Nyusya gave her a free place to live and two meals a day, which the woman cooked for all three of them. It was a convenient arrangement for both; Nyusya didn't have to worry about Talyk, and the woman got out of the barracks where she shared a cubicle with other women who worked at the mine. However, this arrangement was not always perfect.

With the help of Commissar Yan Ryapo, Nyusya was able to get into Kharkovsky Medical Institute's program for *aspirantura*<sup>1</sup>. It was a graduate program mainly preparing students for teaching positions in the institute. Several times during the year the aspirants were required to attend lectures, pass the exams, and attend other parts of the program at the institute in the city of Kharkov. When she needed to travel and to be absent for several days or weeks, she was always afraid to leave Talyk for such long periods with the simple woman, without anybody to supervise both of them.

It was as if her prayers were answered when Nyusya received my letter from Nikitovka<sup>2</sup>, in which I asked her to find out if there were any openings for teaching positions at the local schools in the hamlet where she lived. Indeed, there was one specific position that she believed was perfect for me, and she notified me promptly that I should come right away to apply for the new school year.

I went to Snyezhnoye immediately and found that the administration of *Gorpromuch*<sup>3</sup> that was opening the doors in the fall of the 1928-29 school year was looking for qualified teachers who had the experience of teaching adults. My previous employment at the Rabfak in Yuzovka turned out to be an invaluable reference at the time, when many new schools for adults were opening in all industrial areas of the Soviet Union and experienced teachers were hard to find. I was hired on the spot as a teacher of Russian language and literature.

Nyusya offered me to share her apartment and living expenses. The young woman who was watching Talyk had moved her bed to the kitchen, and I had the smaller room for my family. It was an ideal arrangement and I moved with my daughter Lyalya to the hamlet of Snyezhnoye right away. My husband, Orest, remained in Nikitovka to help his sister Vera take care of their dying father<sup>4</sup>.

My husband shipped by rail our few belongings, which after six years of marriage we kept to a minimum necessary in case we needed to move quickly from one place to another because of my husband's political past. All the possessions we had could be counted on the fingers of two hands: two metal frame beds, one for us and another smaller one for our daughter, a table and four chairs, two book shelves, a medium-size

trunk for storing clothes and linen, a cardboard box for pots and pans, and a primitive washstand my husband made from a metal can attached to a board fastened to the stool on which was placed a bowl to collect the wash water and it had a hook for the small mirror that he used for shaving.

During the first year that my daughter and I lived with my sister, Nyusya was able to make all the necessary trips to Kharkov to fulfill that years' requirements for *aspirantura*. She didn't have to worry because I supervised the woman who watched her little son Talyk. And I felt more secure having a woman during the day to keep an eye on my daughter when I was teaching in *Gorpromuch*. It seemed a perfect accommodation for all of us, including the young woman who in exchange for her services had free meals, a place to live, and some extra money to spend. During the day she cooked for us, watched our children, cleaned the apartment, and washed our clothes.

During that year I had a chance to meet Nyusya's lover, Yan Ryapo, who under an excuse of being on *kommandirovka*<sup>5</sup> came to visit his son and Nyusya several times. He usually stayed only one day, and during his visit he dedicated all his time to enjoying his son Talyk. He used to bring lots of toys for Talyk and many other gifts for him and Nyusya. He was also helping Nyusya financially with his son and her *aspirantura* pursuit.

During that first year Nyusya found temporary work in Snyezhnoye for our youngest brother, Petya<sup>6</sup>, and our stepbrother, Zhorzh<sup>7</sup>. The administration of the coal mine was preparing to celebrate a very important special event—the mine had surpassed the output of coal above and beyond the norm established by the central government in Moscow. Lots of posters had to be designed with visual documentation on colored charts and designs showing the achievements of the miners. Petya was an expert in geometrical drafting, and Zhorzh was quite good in artistic illustrations; between the two of them they made spectacular posters and long placards with all kinds of communist slogans printed in huge letters.

It was a happy time with lots of activity in our apartment while the two young uncles, Petya and Zhorzh, were working on this project. Both Lyalya and Talyk had so much fun sitting or lying on the floor and painting on pieces of leftover paper with colored pencils and paint they had not seen in such abundance before. Lyalya was very impressed with their work and asked her uncle Petya how he had learned to do all this so well. She told him in a very determined way that she wanted to learn it, too, and one day become a designer like he was. She also followed her uncles into the Miners' Club, a big wooden structure that they decorated with their artwork. She helped by passing them hammers and nails to secure the posters to the wooden walls.

The young uncles also had fun playing with the children, especially with Talyk, who had just learned to walk and talk.

One day they surprised Nyusya by teaching Talyk to call her *hadyuka*<sup>8</sup>, which he learned very well by being reinforced by their laughing each time he pronounced this word. For a long time after the young men had finished their work and left for home Lyalya used the remaining paper, pencils, and paints to "teach" classes to the neighborhood children.

My work at the *Gorpromuch* was interesting and I enjoyed working with adult students. At home, life was going smoothly with all three of us women helping each other take care of children and the apartment. It would have been a perfect arrangement if my husband had been living with us too. I missed him very much and

hoped he would join us soon.

I had received two telegrams from him from Nikitovka—one notifying me about the death of his father, and another saying, “It’s time to go.” This message was our secret way of saying that he had to leave in a hurry because of the problems related to his political past. After that I didn’t receive any news from him for long time and feared the worst—that he had finally been arrested by the GPU.

Then I began to receive some postcards once in a while with short messages saying that he was well and that he missed me and our daughter, but they were always without a return address and were mailed from various parts of the country. This indicated that he was trying to cover up the tracks of his whereabouts to lose the GPU investigators on his trail. Several postcards were mailed from as far as the town of Novosibirsk<sup>9</sup>; then suddenly they were mailed from Caucasus<sup>10</sup>. The last one was mailed from as close as the small station in the Donetsk region. The last message was that he would be teaching in a small village school<sup>11</sup>, and that as soon as he had settled down he would send me his address. It was very good news and I waited with great anticipation for his next letter.

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1. Graduate studies.

2. See the chapter “Nikitovka’s Last Gentleman.”

3. Gorpromuch – acronym for *Gorno-Promyshlennoye Uchylishche* - Industrial-Mining School.

4. See the chapter “Nikitovka’s Last Gentleman.”

5. Business trip.

6. Pyetr Gavriylovich Berezhnoy.

7. Zhorzh Ploskogolovy, a son of the second wife of Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy.

8. Viper (in Ukrainian).

9. See the chapter “Uncle Pavel.”

10. See the chapter “The Last Encounter.”

11. See the chapters “The Dispossessed” and “Meeting on the Farmstead.”

## My Childhood In The Hamlet Of Snyezhnoye

By Olga Gladky Verro

I was not six years old yet when my mother and I went to live with my aunt Nyusya in the hamlet of Snyezhnoye. In a very short time I met most of the children of preschool and elementary school age living in the employee section of the hamlet. During the day most of our parents were at work and we were left free to play anywhere in the hamlet—in the wheat fields bordering it, in the forest nearby, or in the miners’ part of the hamlet that was closer to the mine. We always played in small groups and our activities changed depending on the seasons, the weather, and the time of the day.

There was no real danger for us to play at any place in the hamlet or its vicinities, where rarely an occasional horse could be seen slowly pulling some wagon on the unpaved roads. The only person who came two or three times a week was the water-carrier with the big wooden water-barrel, and he stopped near every house to let the

people fill their buckets and other containers with the water.

One of those places that we used to play was the unpaved road that passed right outside the house in which we lived. There, nobody disturbed us. During the dry summer season when the road was covered with a deep layer of hot, soft powdered earth we liked to walk back and forth barefoot, raising puffs of dust with each step. During the rains, when the earth had absorbed enough water, it was transformed into a rich, black, smooth river of mud. Like the ducklings on the pond, we splashed and blended the slippery mixture with our bare feet. When we played long enough, we would wash ourselves with soap under the rain and, before entering the house, would shake off the drops of water like the little birds from their feathers.

And what fun we had when the mud had drained a little to just the right density of a dough from which we would build marvelous mud castles and even entire hamlets alongside the road. We would leave them there to dry in the sun and return every day to play there, with each of us having our "own house" until some clumsy muzhik would destroy our constructions with the wheels of his cart.

When the wheat fields bordering our part of the hamlet were in full growth, we liked to penetrate the thick green sea that would cover the older children up to their shoulders, and the younger ones up to the top of their heads. In the fields we used to collect bright red poppies with delicate petals, brilliant blue long-lasting cornflowers, and white daisies that were hiding between the spikes of wheat just beginning to fill in the seeds.

After the rains we used to walk in the forest collecting all kinds of mushrooms in our baskets. Usually we went into the forest in a large group that included school-age children who could distinguish the edible from the poisonous mushrooms; we, the younger ones, collected only those that the older ones told us to pick. Sometimes we collected full baskets of all sorts of mushrooms, enough to fry in butter for the whole family. At the right seasons we also collected small and sweet wild strawberries, wild raspberries, gooseberries, and other types of berries.

In the early spring, when the snow was not melted yet under the trees, we collected handfuls of delightful smelling lily of the valley flowers and, of course, snowdrop flowers that we used to pull out with their small round bulbs. We peeled them right there and ate the delightful sweet bulb. Later in the spring we used to collect the bitter-smelling purple violets that my mother liked so much.

Besides the snowdrop bulbs our group of children knew many other plants with edible parts. We found them at different seasons in various parts of our neighborhood. In the spring we collected the sour-tasting fleshy leaves of sorrel that we would bring home, and our families would use it to prepare a delicious soup. In the summer we used to walk along the railroad tracks leading to the coal mine. There on the high banks we found many edible grasses and a variety of robust and taller plants. One of them we called "Rabbit Ears" because of the shape of the leaves and the soft whitish downy nap on the surface. These plants had tall and thick stems and hard skin that we peeled revealing a juicy sweet and crunchy inside that we ate on the spot. Then there were other plants with bunches of small yellow flowers probably of the wild turnip family. Their stems were thinner and the skin not as thick and we just chewed them and sucked the sweet juice, spitting out the rough part.

In the evening, usually after supper when it was not quite dark, we congregated

closer to home and played hide-and-seek in the ditches prepared for the foundations of the new homes that were constantly built in the hamlet. The ditches were deep enough to hide most of the younger children and we could run inside without being detected from outside.

Once in a while we would go to the swamp and sit leisurely on the trunk of a fallen tree, and we would observe the frogs and various insects. I remember one time when we went to a swamp and all of us collected tadpoles in bottles filled with water. I don't remember what we intended to do with them the next day, but being afraid that they would escape during the night, I sealed the bottle with a cork and left it on the porch. In the morning I had a lesson in biology by finding out that tadpoles cannot survive without air because all of them were dead.

After the departure of my uncle Petya<sup>1</sup>, who decorated posters and hung them in the Miners' Club, I used the leftover paper, colored pencils, and paints to play "school" in the entrance hall of our apartment. For a long time the children from our neighborhood were students and I, of course, was the teacher. I remembered "how to teach" from the days when we lived in the village of Nyzhnyaya Krynka when I used to go to school with my mother and father and sit in their classes<sup>2</sup>.

On those days when the woman who watched my cousin Talyk was not in the kitchen cooking and her bed was free we played the "hospital" game. There were several children whose mothers or fathers were doctors and worked in the hospital with my aunt Nyusya. They knew the routine of doctors and would take a lead in the game. One of the older children would impersonate a "doctor," assign a "nurse," and use our kitchen as a doctor's office or a hospital room while all the others stayed in line in the entrance hall to wait their turn for the doctor's examination. Some children who were found to be "sick" were ordered to stay in bed; for the others, the "doctor" prescribed some "medications" and water was given to them with a spoon.

There was one family in the hamlet with a deaf-mute boy who was slightly younger than I. His father was a mining engineer who came before the revolution from some European country. He married a local woman and remained to live and work in the mine. They did not allow their son to roam around the hamlet with other children. But his mother, who didn't work, would occasionally call one or two children at a time to play with the boy.

I remember that it was a real treat to be invited by his mother into their apartment. There were many beautiful foreign-made toys that most of the children in our hamlet had never seen anywhere else. The boy liked to set his small table with a miniature porcelain tea set and have a ceremony of a tea party. With a gesture of his hand he would invite us to sit on the small chairs. Then he would carefully pour real tea from a small teapot, passing cups and saucers and small spoons to each of us, and then passing the sugar bowl and the real cookies on a small platter. He communicated with us only with hand gestures and facial expressions, like playing in pantomime, and his very gentle manners detracted from his handicap of not being able to hear and speak.

During that summer my mother bought me a small baby-doll, about ten inches tall, made of flesh-colored gutta-percha that was sold naked under the trade name Pupsyk. It had movable head, arms, and legs and could be placed in a sitting position. Most important, it was washable. That doll opened for me a whole new activity that I

continued for many years to come. The first thing that I did was to find a way to dress her up.

During vacation trips to Slavyansk we also visited my maternal grandfather, who was a tailor. I observed him at work drafting with chalk patterns directly on the wool cloth, cutting the fabrics with big shears, sewing by hand and on the sewing machine. He used to let me play with pieces of cloth, small scissors, and a threaded needle. I liked to imitate him by sewing odd buttons to the fabric and sewing two pieces of cloth together.

Therefore, I started my first project of dressing my Pupsyk with a conviction that I knew how to sew. Neither my mother nor my aunt Nyusya could be of much help to me because both of them didn't learn real sewing techniques other than mending from their father, and they had to use the services of a seamstress. Their coats and suits and my father's outfits were all made by my grandfather during our summer vacations when we visited him in Slavyansk.

To buy fabrics in the cooperative store was not always easy because of constant shortages, and one couldn't choose the quality, colors, or designs of fabrics that were occasionally available for sale. Therefore, my mother and I didn't have too many dresses or other items of clothing. But my aunt Nyusya had a better variety of outfits for herself and for Talyk because she was able to procure them during her visits to the large city of Kharkov and, of course, from the exquisite presents from her lover Yan Ryapo.

However, we were fortunate to live in Donbass, a cradle of the high quality coal anthracite, an essential source of energy for the growing Soviet industry. The government was trying to attract a labor force to that region and to keep the coal miners content by providing them with a reasonable supply of the essential foodstuff, clothing, and other consumer goods which were always in short supply in other regions of the country. But the availability of products in the coal miners' cooperative was sporadic as a result of poor planning, coordination, and distribution. Many times when the cooperative received one kind of a product in large quantities, people from the whole hamlet and vicinities would flock for a buying spree. They would buy as much as they could store, or afford, because one never knew when this product would arrive again, maybe not for another year.

I remember one time when the word reached us that the co-operative had received honey, barrels of honey. To buy it, we had to bring our own containers to be filled and weighed. The four of us, my aunt Nyusya, the woman who lived with us, my mother and I, went several times to fill the jars, bring them home, empty them in whatever container we could find and go back again and again. We ended up with honey everywhere, in all pots and pans, jars, and even the washbasin. The same would happen with all other products that could be preserved. But with fabrics this usually didn't happen, and one could not buy or select much from the few bolts that were snatched away immediately upon arrival.

Well, as soon as I decided to dress up my Pupsyk, I requested that my mother and my aunt give me the remnants of fabrics returned to them by their seamstresses. They gave me only the smaller pieces from their collections and I resented that. I was thinking that they were really stingy. I couldn't figure out what they were saving them for, until I became older and saw those larger pieces being used to enlarge and lengthen my

dresses to make them useful for one more year.

I started my sewing craft by making my Pupsyk very simple straight dresses by draping the fabric around her body and cutting shapes around her neck and armpits. With time I became more skillful and sophisticated in my sewing by learning from our women neighbors, who sewed for themselves and with whom I shared the fashion pictures from a "Women's Journal" to which my mother subscribed. I loved to look at the fashion section of women's and children's clothing and to fantasize that I could sew all those dresses for me.

When we lived in the village of Nizhnyaya Krynka I remember the only Christmas tree that I ever had before the Bolsheviks abolished this religious holiday. My father brought from his home in Nikitovka a box with beautiful Christmas decorations, figurines, and balls made of wax and glass. Then in the evenings my father made toys and other decorations for the Christmas tree from colored paper and cardboard with me helping him. We kept these decorations as heirlooms for many years when Christmas couldn't be celebrated. I remember that sometimes I would secretly open the box, display the contents on the table, and just sit and admire them.

Those skills that I had learned helping my father in constructing those decorations came in handy now in making patterns for my Pupsyk as I looked at the children's fashions in the "Women's Journal" and tried to copy them.

One of our neighbors taught me some simple embroidery stitches and my mother, as well as my neighbor, showed me how to do a simple crochet. I put these skills to use right away and adorned Pupsyk's dresses, crocheted hats for her, bags, and shoes. But the fabric scraps given to me by my mother, aunt, and our neighbor soon were all used up and I found new sources in the garbage piles of other neighbors who discarded them. I collected the precious finds, washed them well, ironed, and voilà, I was making many new outfits for my doll.

The first year we lived in Snyezhnoye without my father, who remained in Nikitovka with his father who was very ill. After being used in Nizhnyaya Krynka to have him all for myself in the evening—teaching me to read and write or making all kinds of toys from paper and cardboard, or just sitting next to me as I was drawing—I missed him very much. Although I understood the reason for us to be separated from him, I continuously asked my mother, "When will Papa come to live with us?"

In January 1929 my mother received a letter from my father in which he wrote that his father's health was going down very fast and they expected that the end would come soon. He wrote that he absolutely didn't want us to come to the funeral.

I heard my mother share with my aunt Nyusya that she was worrying about a short paragraph in the letter stating that he lost his teaching position before the elections for the Soviets, and that he was selecting his options where he should go to look for a new place of employment.

I promptly asked, "Couldn't he find a place to teach here in Snyezhnoye?"

"Lyalya!" warned my mother. "I was talking to your aunt. This is a matter for adults to discuss! You should not meddle in our discussions."

"But I want my father to come and live with us," I replied.

"Well, it is not so easy," explained my mother, "because your father makes very clear in his letter that he is not planning to join us in Snyezhnoye."

"Why?" I insisted.

"Well," she tried again to give me an answer that would make sense in my child's mind, "you see, now that I have a secure and good employment and you and I have good place to live, Papa can travel and look for a really good employment for himself." She could not tell me that from his letter she understood that he needed time to cover up his tracks because his White Army past was haunting him again.

It the middle of February 1929 my grandfather Mikhail Makarovich Gladky died. After his funeral my father remained for a short time in Nikitovka. But soon after Easter we received a very short telegram from him stating only: "It's time to go. Wait for my address." I didn't know that it was a coined phrase that my father used when a danger of being arrested by the GPU seemed to be imminent. The telegram was not even signed and my mother told my aunt, "He must have been either in a hurry, or he didn't want his name to appear on the telegram." I was puzzled again with her comment.

After that, during the summer we received an occasional postcard with pictures of some places unknown to me, but he wrote only a few phrases and didn't ever mention visiting us. I imagined all kinds of scenarios of what could have happened to him. My mother's explanations for his continuing absence were not making sense in my child's mind. After being used to being so close to him, I just felt that there was something wrong, and that I was being abandoned by my father.

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1. See the chapter "In the Hamlet of Snyezhnoye."

2. See the chapter "The Village School."

## Children's Health Resort In Crimea

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

In the fall of 1929 we finally received a letter from my father. He notified us that he was working as a teacher in a village school and living on the farmstead called Proletarskaya Volya<sup>1</sup> that was also located in Donbass. He wrote that he missed us very much and promised to come for a couple of days at the beginning of October. I waited impatiently for his visit.

When he arrived, I was very happy to see him after the long separation, but I was disappointed right away because he was already talking about departing again. But he promised to come and see us when the schools were out for vacation. It was during that visit on the third of October that we went down the hill to the village of Snyezhnoye to the photographer's studio to have a picture made of the three of us.<sup>2</sup> The next morning he left again.

From then on during the long winter he wrote to us regularly, and especially to me. In his letters he included pictures of the farmstead in the fall and later in the winter covered with snow. I responded to my father by drawing big pictures and writing new words and short sentences that I was learning to write under my mother's guidance. However, the intensive correspondence between him and me was not a substitute for

him being close to me in person and I was constantly annoying my mother asking why Papa could not find work here and live with us. My mother told me that she was trying hard to find him a teaching position in the local schools.

In the winter of 1930 my mother found out that she could send me free for one month to the children's health resort in Crimea. She immediately applied with the administration of *Gorpromuch*<sup>3</sup> for a free accommodation in the summer for me in a health resort with facilities for therapy treatment, called *sanatoriy*. But since I was not yet of school age I received accommodations for the early spring instead. My mother had to get permission to take me to the health resort in Yevpatoria, a town in Crimea on the southern shore of the Black Sea. Since I was to be discharged before the school year was over, my father agreed that after one month he would go and bring me back home. When my mother told me this big news, just hearing that I would see my father soon made me very happy and I was full of joy during our long trip to Yevpatoria.

It was another matter when we arrived at the health resort and I had to say good-bye to my mother. When the resort instructor tried to take me from my mother, I felt terribly scared that like my father, I would not see my mother anymore. I grabbed around her body with both hands and started to scream, "No! No! No!" Two people had to pull me from her and forcefully lead me out of the registration office, while I continued to scream.

I was led to the processing room where there were many other screaming children. One by one, boys and girls all had a complete haircut, leaving us girls looking like boys. Then we were undressed by the women aides, bathed in the bathtubs and scrubbed with sponges, weighed by the nurse, and examined by several doctors, all dressed in white uniforms. Finally, we were given the resort uniforms and were ordered to dress up. Each of us was assigned a bed in one of two huge rooms, one for the girls, and the other for the boys.

The resort was a long white one-story building with a patio that extended half its length on the backside of the building, and there was a large fenced courtyard. Beyond the low fence dividing it from the seashore there was a nice sandy beach. Many trees of different kinds—not growing in the Ukraine and unknown to me—surrounded the building.

From the first day the children were drilled to get used to the strict daily schedule and routine for all activities conducted under the guidance of resort instructors. For me, used to being free at home to do anything I wanted at any time with my friends, it was hard to be constantly told what I had to do. But after a few days I got used to the daily routine and began to slowly accept without resentment the strict discipline imposed on us.

At seven o'clock in the morning we all had to get up at the same time, wash our faces in the long washroom with many faucets, dress ourselves in the uniforms, come out in the courtyard, forming neat rows facing the sea, and for about fifteen minutes follow the instructor's commands for physical exercises. After that we would go to the patio and sit at an assigned table for a breakfast that always included a glass of milk. On some days we had a soft or hard-boiled egg and buttered bread; on other days we had some cooked cereal, like cream of wheat.

After breakfast we would go just across the courtyard to the beach wearing only our shorts for sunbathing. On the sound of a whistle we had to lie down on the sand on

one side, and on the next whistle, to turn all together to another side, then on the belly, then on the back. The sunbathing was gradually increased from five minutes all together on the first day to probably five minutes on each side after one week. On the sound of a whistle we had to get up, form a line on the edge of the water holding each other's hands, with instructors on both ends and in the middle. On the next whistle we had to advance slowly into incoming foamy waves, and on command of the instructor's whistle to immerse all together in the water. Only after we were wet did they allow us to splash for a short period in the shallow water close to the shore. They did not teach us how to swim.

For those children who needed special cures or therapy, it was provided either in the morning, or in the afternoon. Lunch was early, by twelve o'clock. We usually had a soup of some kind, a piece of bread, meat or fish, and some kind of *kasha*<sup>4</sup>, or potatoes, and at the end of the meal there was a dessert, mostly some kind of fruit *kissye*<sup>5</sup> or pudding. After lunch we all had to take a one-hour nap in our beds and the silence was strictly enforced.

In the afternoon we had long walks under the shade of the trees in the park that was shared with the other health resorts. We had to march in pairs and sing the songs of the Young Pioneers<sup>6</sup>, or revolutionary songs. All activities were conducted in small or large groups and always directed by the instructors. After the walk we would play ball or other group games in shaded parts of the courtyard.

One of the group games that I liked very much was called *zhmurky*<sup>7</sup>, where one child was blindfolded and had to catch someone and guess who it was. Another game was called *Anuka otgaday*<sup>8</sup>, it was a group game where all children would sit on the ground in a circle holding both hands like in a prayer and one child, called the "giver," would go around holding a very small object between his palms. He would insert his hands between the palms of all children who were sitting and at some point leave the object with one of them. Another child called the "guesser" was supposed to guess who had received the object. When he found the right person that person became the "guesser," and he became the new "giver."

One of the preferred games by most children was called *Mostik*<sup>9</sup> in which the children stood in pairs with one arm up and holding the partner's hand forming a passageway. One child would be without a partner and he would run through the passage selecting a partner and they would come out to stay at the front. The child who remained without a partner then started to run. Only before supper did we have some time for completely free, non-directed activities—socializing, talking, or playing with the other children.

For supper they gave us cream of wheat, rice pudding, or other porridge and a glass of milk. After supper they divided the children into age groups and one of the instructors would read us stories from books. Many times they read to us poetry from the famous classical Russian writers, such as Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin, or the fables by Ivan Andreyevich Krylov. But mostly they read us stories about the young pioneers and their brave deeds for the good of the Communist Party and the Soviet State, or about how "our Father Stalin" was good to small children.

By eight o'clock we were all in bed with the only lights on near the bathroom doors. This was the hardest time for me to lie in bed with open eyes and turn from one side to another, not being able to fall asleep because at home from the time I was a

small child I used to stay up late sharing this time with my parents. The silence here was strictly enforced and most of the children were sound asleep very quickly, but not me. To pass the time I would walk very slowly several times to the bathroom until one of the night instructors would ask me if I was not feeling well and would accompany me to bed. Then I had to remain in bed feeling lonely and missing my parents terribly. I was imagining that both parents had abandoned me and would never come to take me home. Then I would remember my mother's words, "Papa will come to take you home." As soon as I would start to think about seeing my father, my fears would slowly dissipate and make my sleepless hours more bearable until I was able to fall asleep.

But during the day I had a more positive outlook because every morning I annoyed the instructors by asking them how many days remained until we would go home. And since I was already able to count, I knew that the waiting period until my father would come was becoming shorter every day. During the last days before the end of our term at the health resort, the anticipation of seeing my father became more intense, but the doubts that nobody would come for me were also renewed with more frequency during the night, leaving me irritable and disobedient to the orders of the instructors in the morning.

Finally, the evening before the day of our departure, my father arrived and came to see me. I was allowed to stay with him after supper instead of listening to the stories. But when the time came to go to bed, I would not let my father leave and had tantrums, crying and screaming, making it hard for everybody. Finally, my father found the solution by telling me that he would sit on the terrace where I could see him from the window of my room. I was allowed by the instructor to stay near the window and watch him for a while, then to lie down on my bed and to check on him once in a while when I wanted to. I remember seeing his contours against the night sky of the southern shore of the Black Sea.

When I woke up in the morning there were many parents in the courtyard waiting to take their children home. And I saw my father—Oh! What a relief!—he was sitting on the terrace waiting for me. In a hurry I had my breakfast and changed from the resort uniform into my own clothes. My father was prompting me, "Go and say good-bye to the instructors."

But I categorically refused to do it by telling him, "I don't care about any of them! I am tired of hearing their commands of what we have to do next!"

"Don't you want to say good-bye to your friends?" he asked.

I looked around in the crowd of anxious children who were trying to find their parents and answered, "The instructors did not let us make friends because we had always to stay in a group. I don't have anybody special to make a fuss about in leaving this place."

"Didn't you like to stay here at all?" wondered my father. "Well I liked to go to the beach and play in the water," I answered, "because they let us to play free for a while."

As we were waiting for the train, I asked my father if he would now stay with us in Snyezhnoye. My father never lied to me, even when he knew that the truth would not please me. He usually tried to explain the reason for his answers, hoping that it would make sense in my child's mind. So, he hoped that it would work this time also and said, "Not yet. I have to finish the school year in the village. I cannot leave before the summer vacation starts. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I answered.

But my fear of losing him again came over me and I became nervous and capricious. I started to annoy him to buy me a pastry. We went to the buffet inside the railroad station and found that there were no pastries in the display case. My father asked the sales clerk if they had any hidden in the storage. The answer was, "No. We are out of pastries." I started to whimper and fuss and there was no way my father could stop me until the time came to board our train.

While my father was looking for a comfortable place for us to sit, I was distracted from annoying him. But as soon as we settled down I resumed my whining, "I want a pastry...buy me a pastry..." My father was trying to calm me down by reasoning with me that there was no place that he could buy it until we arrived at the station where we had to change trains. But I continued to whine and he was embarrassed in front of the other passengers.

Sitting near the window on the opposite bench of our compartment was a military officer. After listening to my whimpering for some time, he got up, reached for his suitcase on the luggage shelf, placed it on the small train table near the window, carefully removed from a cardboard box a beautiful éclair covered with chocolate, and handed it to me. To the surprise of the generous man, and of my father, and of the rest of the passengers in the compartment, I refused to take it and declared stubbornly, "No! I don't want your pastry. My father has to buy it for me!"

"Well," said the officer in a very business-like manner looking at my father, "do you want to buy this pastry from me for your daughter? It cost one ruble."

My father smiled in agreement and thanked him ceremoniously for his generosity, then pulled out from his pocket one ruble; he handed it to the officer, who gave him the pastry. Only then I accepted the pastry from my father and sat close to him liking the chocolate and sucking the sweet filling from the inside.

Soon after this incident the officer arrived at his destination and I immediately climbed on the empty seat near the open window. I stood up holding my arms on the edge of the glass and enjoyed catching the wind in my face. At that time of the year in Crimea the temperature was pleasant and my father was not worried about me catching a cold. I was mesmerized by running from me trees, houses, and fields, and I stayed at the window watching the ever-changing landscape until we arrived at the station where we had to change trains.

At that station we had to wait several hours for the connecting train to arrive. My father bought some hard candies at the station's buffet and we went to the small public garden nearby and sat on the bench to wait. As I was munching one candy after another, some small pieces fell on the ground and immediately I saw a few ants scurrying around the sweet crumbs, trying to pull them somewhere. After a while reinforcements of ants came and we found the way to pass the time. We purposefully dropped some more candy crumbs and the whole army of ants came to retrieve and pull them to their nest, which was several feet away from the bench near a patch of grass. It took them more than one hour of collective and organized effort to transport all that treasure to their nest. We followed them, wondering how they were able to communicate with each other to pull it in the right direction. My father took the opportunity to give me a lesson in biology, explaining about these small and skillful creatures.

We arrived late at night at the hamlet of Snyezhnoye. I was so exhausted from

the long trip that I fell asleep right away and didn't wake up until late in the morning. My mother and my aunt Nyusya went to work, and in the house was only a woman with my little cousin Talyk. There was nothing unusual about that, except that when I asked her where my father was she told me that very early in the morning he had gone back to the place where he worked, I began to scream, cry, and have tantrums. The woman did not know what to do with me and just allowed me to cry out my frustration. Finally, I went outside and found some of my friends to play with.

When my mother returned from work, I had calmed down and we had a supper together. But when she asked me about my trip back home with my father I snapped again and began to cry, asking her why my father had to go away again. Suddenly, my mother looked at me and screamed, "Stop doing that! Do you hear me? Stop doing that!" Her tone of voice was so unusual that I stopped crying at once, but she continued to repeat, "Stop doing that!"

I looked at her puzzled, "I stopped crying, Mama...what else do you want me to stop doing?"

"Stop grimacing! I am telling you, stop it!"

"I am not doing anything, Mama," I answered.

"What do you mean, you are not doing it? Why are you having that wry smile?"

"I don't know, Mama,...I am not smiling, Mama..."

My mother's anxiety was contagious and I became scared not knowing what was going on. She called her sister and two of them started to examine my face. Aunt Nyusya told my mother to call right away our next-door neighbor, a very fat woman doctor who worked with her in the hospital. When she examined me, her diagnosis was: "One-sided facial paralysis"<sup>10</sup> that needs immediate intervention with physical therapy to prevent the affected nerves from dying."

"Why?" was asking my mother. "What caused it? She was all right last night when she arrived from Crimea. What could have happened to her today? Is it contagious for Talyk?"

The doctor reassured her that it was not contagious. Then she suggested that it could have been caused by a draft from the train window.

"Did you look out of the train window?" asked my mother.

"Yes, I did. All the way from Crimea to the station where we changed trains," I answered.

"Well, then it was a cold draft that caused it," concluded the doctor and added with strong conviction, "Tomorrow morning you should bring her to the hospital and we shall start right away with the physical therapy."

I couldn't figure out what I had done wrong and what all this fuss was about.

Our neighbor doctor arranged for me to be admitted to the hospital's children's ward and for several weeks I underwent intensive physical therapy, massages, electrical stimulation, heat applications, and lots of rest in bed, which I hated. The warm weather had arrived and I wanted to play outside. My mother promised me that as soon as the summer vacation started, I would go home. Meanwhile she and my aunt Nyusya visited me every day and brought me sweets and books.

The intensive physical therapy somewhat improved the severity of the paralyzed nerves and the left side of my face became a little bit relaxed. The doctor suggested then that I could be treated daily as an outpatient. Finally, my mother told me she would

take me home.

During the summer my mother and I walked every day to the hospital, where I continued to receive physical therapy, massages, electrical stimulation, and heat applications. Although it took a long time to walk to and from the hospital and several hours of waiting and treatment, when I returned home I could play outside with my friends in the late afternoon and in the evening.

Until I started to have contact with the children, I really didn't understand what had happened to me, because, from the time the paralysis struck me, I was in contact only with the adults who took care of me and treated me. They did not laugh at me and did not make jokes about my distorted facial features, although I was puzzled by what I perceived as their concern about my face. During all that time I didn't see my face in a mirror because there were no mirrors around me.

When I started to go outside to play with the children, I finally understood that something strange had happened to me. At first, the children found it very amusing, thinking that I was trying to make them laugh by grimacing, and they were curious about how I was able to do it; some attempted to imitate me. But it did not last for long. As soon as they found out that I could not change the expression on my face, they found it to be weird and started to tease me and call me all kinds of ugly names. Only a few children, whom I later considered as my true friends, were able to accept it as an illness which afflicted me and for which I was receiving treatment in the hospital. I began to avoid those children who were unkind to me and to seek the company of only those who did not bother me with teasing and name-calling.

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1. See the chapters "The Dispossessed" and "Meeting on the Farmstead."
  2. See the copy of the photograph.
  3. Gorpromuch – acronym for *Gorno-Promyshlennoye Uchilishche* - Industrial Mining School.
  4. Porridge.
  5. Pudding made with fruit or fruit juice and potato starch.
  6. Communist youth organization for school-age children.
  7. Blindman's Bluff.
  8. Who Has It?
  9. The Bridge.
  10. Bell's Palsy.

## My Father Returns To Live With Us

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

My mother was becoming frustrated having to deal with my illness by herself. One evening she went to visit our neighbor, a woman doctor, who was treating me at the hospital and told her, "It would be much easier for me if my husband was with us. If I could only find a teaching position for him here."

Doctor's husband, who was also a teacher in Snyezhnoye, heard her complaints

and said, "At the Rabfak where I teach they are desperately searching for a teacher of chemistry and biology for the next school year. They are trying to fill this position before the school's summer vacation begins. If your husband is qualified to teach those subjects, I suggest that he apply immediately while there are a few more days left in this school year."

My mother felt that this employment opportunity was simply falling into my father's lap and absolutely should not be lost. Since there was no direct and convenient transportation to the farmstead Proletarskaya Volya where my father lived, my mother hired a man who had a horse and a wagon to drive her there and back. When she told my father that there was a chance to find employment at the Rabfak, he agreed that this was a unique opportunity for him and asked to be dismissed from his school right away. On the next day they arrived in Snyezhnoye.

The administration at the Rabfak was so anxious to fill in the vacant position that they didn't even ask my father for any documentation of his qualifications—they held only a brief interview with him about his education. And they didn't request the usual references of his political or military status. For them the most important references were that my aunt Nyusya was recommended by the Commissar Ryapo, that she had already been employed for two years as a doctor in the local hospital, and that my mother had already been for a year in the *Gorpromuch*. Having the family living there meant that my father would be a more permanent employee than someone whose family was somewhere else. Therefore, he was hired as a teacher of chemistry and biology at the Rabfak for the 1930-31 school year.

The doctors who were treating me realized soon that the paralysis had reached the stage when the improvement was progressing slowly and that there was no need for intensive treatment at the hospital. They suggested we find the apparatus for electrical stimulation and continue the treatment at home.

In our hamlet and in the neighboring small towns this apparatus was impossible to find. My father remembered that he had seen it at his home in Nikitovka; his mother had required it after she had a paralysis of her hands. It was a pre-revolutionary model that worked on batteries, but our neighbor doctor told him that it should do the work as well as the one in the hospital.

My father went to Nikitovka for one day and indeed found it there intact since it had not been bartered along with the other things that were in demand during the time of famine. At that time he also shipped by the rail his father's desk and a book cabinet with glass doors, increasing our furniture possessions.

It was the autumn of 1930. I was seven-and-a-half and my parents decided to enroll me in the first grade of the elementary school. During the first days in school the pupils were taught the alphabet and calligraphy. We had to fill in the whole pages with single letters: "A," "B," and "C." Since I knew already how to write, I endured this nonsense for the "A." But when the teacher started the class with the "B," I filled the page with the words "mama," "papa," "cat," "dog," "house," and many more that I knew at that time. Then I made a few additions and subtractions, and at the end designed a house and trees and wrote their names underneath.

When the teacher collected the papers, to my surprise, she did not like what I had done. She asked, "Why didn't you do the assignment?"

Since I was used to receiving compliments from my parents for doing my best, I

answered her very frankly, "Because I know how to write all the letters and I was bored to sit there and fill-in the whole page with the same letter."

"Well," replied the teacher sternly, "you better come tomorrow morning with your mother to talk with me."

The next day I was placed in the second grade, as it was suggested by the teacher and by the school director. My mother agreed without any objections. I found myself completely comfortable studying in the second grade. At least there was a challenge to learn something new and my grades were always "Good" or "Very good."

But it was a different story dealing with the cruelty of the children, and I had to adjust myself to their teasing and name-calling. There was no way I could hide the distortion on the left side of my face, and it quickly became an easy target for their jokes. I complained about this to my mother and father and both of them tried to console me. The most convincing assurance they gave me was that the electrical stimulation my father was doing for me every evening would slowly relax the nerves and my face would then return to normal.

My mother's complaint to the teacher and to the director of the school didn't work well, because I was told to report to them when somebody bothered me with the name-calling and they promised to punish them. Well, a few times I told to the teacher and she admonished my classmates, but they changed their tactics and, instead of teasing me in class or in school, they switched to the name-calling outside, when I was going to school or returning home.

My father's approach to help me cope with the teasing children was different and more effective, because under his guidance I began to learn how to deal with those who were unkind to me. Slowly he helped me to develop a strategy that relied completely on my own responses to the provocation and did not involve anybody else.

He taught me several basic rules: "Don't pay any attention to anyone who teases you. Don't show them that it bothers you, because that's exactly what they want, to see you upset. Try to completely ignore those who offend you by name-calling, and walk by them looking straight ahead like they do not exist. Avoid the company of children who laugh at you, and play or talk only with those who are kind to you. And don't complain to the teacher—she doesn't have control outside the classroom." It was not easy for me to learn this behavior, but I believed my father and tried hard following his instructions. In the long run I was able to control my responses to teasing and name-calling by the malicious children.

Now that I was going to school, I had less time to play outside. Also I made a selection of whom I would play. One of the children I played with often was a deaf-mute boy whose mother was glad to invite me anytime I came to their apartment. Then there were several of my old friends who came to play with me in our kitchen and entrance hall. We often played "house" with our dolls and each would bring some of her own toys. One day after they were gone, I discovered that my small toy iron that I used to iron my doll's clothes and fabrics had disappeared. I was very upset and complained to my parents. My father suggested that I go to each of the girls who had played with me that day and ask them if they didn't take it inadvertently. But none of them would admit that she had taken it. So, for a while I didn't allow them to come and play with me in our apartment. But I really missed my iron when I was sewing or washing my doll's clothes.

One day when I was playing with the deaf-mute boy at his place, I saw on the

bottom of his toy-box the toy iron almost like mine. I reasoned, "He is a boy, and he never plays with this iron that is lying idle with other forgotten toys. But I need it when I sew." The temptation to take it home with me was strong, but I knew that my father would not approve. Well, I devised a scheme to bring it home and hide it somewhere and then make believe that I found *my* iron.

The next time I went to play with the boy, I brought some of my toys with me, and, when I was returning home, I also took his toy iron with me. At home I did hide it under a wardrobe in my aunt's room. When my parents came home, I made a big fuss again looking for my iron everywhere, under the beds, in the kitchen, and in my aunt's room. Then suddenly I screamed with joy, "I found it! I found it! Here, under the wardrobe!"

My father said, "You see, and we thought that your friends have stolen it. Let me see it." When he took the iron in his hands, he wondered, "Strange, it was hidden a long time under the wardrobe and there is not a speck of dust on it." He began to examine it carefully and saw the trademark on the iron stamped in a foreign language.

It did not take him long to figure out that it was not my iron, which had been manufactured in our country. I saw my father's face become very stern when he, looking straight in my eyes, asked me, "Where did you get this iron? Tell me the truth!"

I knew that my father never punished me if I told him the truth, even if what I had done was wrong. He would usually give me a long lecture on why I shouldn't do it again. I realized that my trick did not work and I told him that I took it from a deaf-mute boy and justified myself, "He is a boy, and he never plays with it. But I need it to iron my Pupsyk's clothes!"

As I expected, my father told me that what I had done was stealing, which could not be justified with any excuses. "Do you remember how you felt when your iron was stolen?" he asked me. "That's how this boy will feel when he discovers that his iron has disappeared."

He ordered me to take the toy iron right away back to the boy's home. He wanted me to apologize to the boy's mother, but I absolutely refused to do that. Then he agreed that I could save my humiliation by saying that I took it home with my toys after I played with the boy because I thought that this one was mine: I had similar toy iron and it had disappeared. However, I had to promise my father that I would never do it again. When I came home, my father promised me that as soon as he went somewhere to the big city, he would try to find and buy another toy iron for me. This was my first and the last lesson about stealing. My father accomplished teaching me about it without punishment.

## Scarlet Fever And Diphtheria Outbreak

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

In the beginning of the winter of 1930-31 there was a sudden outbreak of scarlet

fever and diphtheria in the hamlet of Snyezhnoye. As a doctor in the local hospital my aunt Nyusya<sup>1</sup> knew that the isolation ward was quickly filling with children and adults. She told my mother to check with my teacher and if there were any sick children in my class to keep me out of school until the epidemic subsided. But her warning came too late for me.

I still remember the day my mother came home from a cooperative store with a tall, narrow terra cotta jar glazed in a rust-brown color. I got interested in what was inside such an unusual and pretty container. My mother told me that it was full of marinated brown Russula mushrooms, which I liked very much, and that we would have them for supper when Papa returned from work. I began to beg my mother to give me one to taste before supper and was so delighted to see her opening the jar. She took a fork, removed one mushroom, and kept it up to let some marinade drip into the jar. In an anticipation of such delicacy my mouth filled up with saliva, which I swallowed, and screamed, "A-a-a!" from a strong pain in my throat.

"What is a matter? Are you hurting somewhere?" asked my mother anxiously.

"Yes," I answered, "my throat hurts when I swallow." I saw my mother drop quickly into the jar the mushroom, which she was ready to give me.

Raising her voice she asked me, "You have a sore throat?!" And without waiting for my answer she commanded, "Open your mouth! Put your tongue out! Say 'A-a-a.'"

She carefully inspected my throat and her diagnosis was, "Yes, you have a very red throat." Then she placed her hand on my forehead and announced with concern on her face, "You have a fever. You are coming down with something. Go to bed right away and I will take your temperature."

"Give me the mushroom first," I demanded.

"No. Not with that inflammation in your throat! You cannot have marinated mushrooms," she answered sternly.

But I started to jump on my bed and to scream, "I want a mushroom! Give me a mushroom!"

Hearing a commotion in our room, my aunt Nyusya came in holding Talyk in her arms and asked what was going on. My mother warned her, "Get the boy quickly out of this room. Lyalya has a red throat and I think also a fever. It could be contagious."

"I told you," replied my aunt, "that there are already several cases of a diphtheria and scarlet fever among the children in the workers' part of the hamlet and in the school, and one of the teachers is in the hospital with a severe case of scarlet fever. Diphtheria is especially vicious among babies, toddlers, and younger children. We better call the doctor immediately to see what's wrong with Lyalya."

Our next-door neighbor, a woman doctor, came right away and examined my chest, face, hands and arms, which were already beginning to be covered with red spots. "It is indeed scarlet fever," she concluded. "You have to take her immediately to the hospital to the contagious diseases unit," she ordered. "And boil all the dishes and clothes that she came in contact with in the last few days."

My mother went across the street to ask the man who had a horse and sled to get ready to take me to the hospital. She dressed me up like I was going to the North Pole, and as soon as my father arrived from work he called the man to say we were ready. All three of us sat on the sled and arrived at the hospital after dark.

The doctor who examined me confirmed the diagnosis and ordered I

immediately be placed in the isolation room of the contagious diseases ward. I started to scream and didn't want my mother to leave me. The doctor felt that if my mother had scarlet fever as a child, it would be better for her to stay with me in the hospital room. "But you should know," he warned her, "you have to stay here without going home for forty days until she is not contagious anymore."

"But how should I arrange it with the administration of *Gorpromuch*?" wondered my mother.

"Don't you worry, I will issue a statement that you have to stay in quarantine because you may contaminate your students." My mother agreed, and she was allowed to sleep on a cot in my room.

I had a very light case of the disease and didn't have the patience to stay put in my bed. I was constantly getting up and walking in the hall of the ward. The doctor instructed my mother to try to keep me in bed because of various complications that could follow scarlet fever. My mother tried to keep me occupied all the time by making me work on lessons that I was missing in school, by reading to me, by telling me fables and stories, by suggesting that I draw pictures of the hospital for my father, and write letters to take home when I was discharged. Meanwhile, the nurses decorated the ward halls with my pictures. Later, I found out that I was not allowed to take anything home from the hospital and was very disappointed that I couldn't show my work to my father.

But all this passive activity did not satisfy my need to be active. I hated staying in bed and was driving my mother out of her mind by making somersaults on my bed and by running around the ward visiting other patients. I still remember one very fat woman, a teacher from my school, who at her age got scarlet fever too, but in an extremely severe form with very high fever. When she started to get better, my mother and I visited her every day. I was impressed that, while my skin was peeling in very fine scales, she was removing the heavy rough skin from her puffy hands like pieces of a torn glove. Toward the end of my illness the doctor told my mother that as a result of my being so active during the illness and as an aftereffect of the scarlet fever infection I had myocarditis. And indeed, from that time on I was always out of breath when I was going uphill or up the stairs.

While I was in the hospital, my aunt Nyusya received notice that she had to travel to Kharkov for her graduate study exams and for *aspirantura* and she needed my mother to be home to watch her son Talyk. She asked a favor from her colleague doctor in the contagious diseases ward to dismiss me from the hospital one week earlier than the forty days established by the regulations for quarantine. He agreed under the conditions that I would be confined to my room and that I didn't come in contact with anybody for one more week.

Again, my father hired the man with the sled from our hamlet who had brought us to the hospital to take us back home. Because it was very cold and windy, my mother dressed me in warm clothing my father brought from home, and then they bundled me like a mummy with several blankets. They even covered my face, leaving only a slit for my eyes. At home I was not allowed to leave our room, or to play, or to touch my cousin Talyk. My mother was considered to be germ-free because all her clothes had been disinfected at the hospital.

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1. See the chapters "Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya," "In the Hamlet of Snyezhnoye," and "My

## The Raging Snowstorm

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

The winter of 1930-31 was very cold and snowy. It was the middle of January when I returned home from the hospital.<sup>1</sup> The next day my aunt was ready to depart for Kharkov for her scheduled graduate exams. Early in the morning the snow was falling heavily, promising high accumulations in our region. My mother suggested to her sister that maybe it would be better for her to postpone the trip, since during such weather there might be long delays with the departures of trains until the railroad tracks were cleared. But Aunt Nyusya would not even hear about it; there were some important matters requiring her presence there at that time and, by not being there, she would jeopardize her opportunity to obtain the *aspirantura* assignment.

That morning Talyk was cranky and asking his mother to hold him. Because she was busy getting ready to go, my mother took him in her arms and was consoling him, assuming that he was upset because his mother was going away. My aunt also attributed it to his anxiety about her departure. She gave him a quick good-bye kiss and hurried out the door.

When she was leaving, Talyk was crying very hard and was reaching out toward her with his little arms. My mother couldn't calm him down for a long time after her sister was gone. Finally, he got exhausted from sobbing and fell asleep in my mother's arms. She slowly put him down in his little bed. Because of all this commotion no one really noticed that Talyk was not feeling well.

Indeed he didn't sleep long and woke up crying. My mother said she felt something was wrong by the way he cried, like he had some kind of physical pain. She was asking him to show her where it was hurting, but he couldn't tell her anything. She touched his forehead and felt that Talyk had a temperature.

Because the snowfall was increasing in intensity, the woman who watched Talyk during the day decided to leave earlier for work on the second shift. My mother asked her on her way out to call our neighbor doctor, who had just returned home from the hospital earlier than usual because of the bad weather. The doctor examined Talyk very carefully and said that he probably was coming down with scarlet fever, which he might have caught from me. She said to give him half-tablet of aspirin and to keep him warm. She promised to check on him tomorrow and, if needed, she would recommend taking him to the hospital.

In the late afternoon the heavy snowfall changed to a raging snowstorm with powerful winds. The snowdrifts were accumulating quickly around one-story houses. Soon, all the windows were covered with snow and we couldn't see what was going on outside and when the evening came. Talyk continued to cry in my mother's arms and she didn't know what to do with him. I was so impressed with the events of that day

that I didn't want to go to bed. My father was anticipating how hard it would be to shovel the snow in the morning and was nervously smoking his pipe on the porch since my mother never allowed him to smoke in the house.

My mother was worrying about Talyk's condition and was constantly monitoring his temperature, which became extremely high. She asked my father to call our neighbor doctor again. But as my father opened the entrance door of the porch to get out, he found a solid white snow wall. He began to pound the snow with a shovel to one side, away from the house wall. Then he pounded it up toward the roof and at last he pounded the remaining snow down the steps and to the ground. Working in small increments of about a half-meter at the time, he slowly made a tunnel along the side of the house.

I put on my winter coat and wool kerchief and was watching his progress with curiosity, although my mother was worrying that I was not yet ready to breathe the cold air. When my father made a long passage and reached the front of the house, he finally was able to make an opening in the snow wall. He couldn't believe his eyes. He raised me up and allowed me to glance outside. The whole hamlet had disappeared. It looked like a strange Nordic landscape. The snow drifts accumulated around the houses, covering them completely including the roofs, forming many closely placed white hills barely detectable in the blizzard.

To reach our neighbor's house my father had to dig a trench through the snow that in some places was as high as his armpits. It took him a long time to do that and to make a tunnel to their door. Finally, at about midnight, the doctor could get out of her house accompanied by my exhausted father.

She took Talyk's temperature and ordered that my mother continue to give him the aspirin and put cold compresses on his forehead. Then she examined his throat and shook her head making her final diagnosis that he had a very severe case of diphtheria and needed to be transported to the hospital in the morning. She said not to worry about the transportation to the hospital, because the mine administration would send drivers with sleighs to the hamlet to pick up the doctors and mine employees, and they would take Talyk with them.

My mother and father stayed awake all night. She was taking care of Talyk changing cold compresses, holding him in her arms, and comforting him as he cried from pain. My father was busy reinforcing the walls of the snow tunnel to be ready in the morning to take Talyk to the hospital.

Toward the morning, before daylight, Talyk started to have difficulty in breathing and my mother again sent my father to call our neighbor doctor. To get there he had to again shovel the previously made trench. When the doctor came, she said that the diphtheria infection had reached the dangerous stage very quickly and unexpectedly and that Talyk would die unless we took him to the hospital immediately or get him the oxygen from the pharmacy down the hill in the village of Snyezhnoye.

My father went out again with the shovel to make a trench to the house of the only man in the hamlet who had a horse. He could not make a straight-line trench because the snow was too high in some places and he was going around the drifts finding the shallower spots. When he reached the house, the man was outside digging a trench to the horse's barn.

My father greeted the man with respect and told him that a child was dying and

he was the only one who could help to save him. If he could only drive them, either to the hospital, or to the pharmacy in the village. Hearing my father's request, the man looked at him in disbelief and asked, "How could you dare ask me to drive in this kind of weather? Do you want me to kill my horse? She will sink in this high snow before we get out of the hamlet. It's impossible to get anywhere through this snow with the horse!"

Discouraged, my father returned home empty-handed. My mother asked the doctor to watch Talyk; she put on her warm coat and woolen shawl and ventured outside. She followed the footsteps in the trench made by my father to the house of the man who had a horse. She implored him to help her. But the man was firm in his decision, "I cannot kill my horse! She will sink in this high snow and freeze to death! She could never reach the hospital or the pharmacy!"

"The child is dying!" was supplicating my mother. "Please, have mercy, save the little boy!"

"Wo-o-o-man, do you understand, that the snow is too high! The horse will get stuck in the first high snowdrift on the road and no one would be able to get her out. She will freeze to death, and all of us will freeze too!"

But my mother was not yielding, "If the child dies," she reproached the man, "it will be on your conscience!" She made a few steps toward her home and then returned back and appealed in desperation once more to the heartless man, "Please, please reconsider your decision. I am leaving with a hope that you will change your mind." But he didn't...

When she returned home, the doctor said that there was nothing she could do to prevent Talyk from suffocating, his throat was completely obstructed by swelling. He was not crying anymore and they could hardly hear his breathing.

My mother cradled her nephew in her arms and rocked him as if expecting that this might help him. But it was too late to save him. The doctor was watching the dying child helplessly, unable to help him. She took his hand, trying to detect his pulse, and shaking her head. Then, to be sure, she put a stethoscope to his chest and said, "Poor Talyk, it is over... Why did this little child have to suffer so much?" And then she added, almost excusing herself for not being able to detect the problem sooner, "Who could have predicted that this infection would proceed with lightning speed? It was a very rare fulminant form of diphtheria!" And she told my crying mother to put Talyk in his little bed.

My father entered from outside where he was still shoveling the snow and announced, "It is already daybreak. Maybe we can bring the boy to the hospital now."

The doctor, who was ready to leave, replied, "It is too late, Talyk died a few minutes ago."

My mother came out of her sister's room, all in tears and repeating, "Poor little Talyk... Poor little Talyk..."

Before leaving, the doctor told my mother that she would make an official report and sign a certificate of Talyk's death. She also said she would make all the arrangements to have a small coffin sent to our home as soon as possible. She gave my mother very strict instructions not to allow anybody to enter in the house, until it could be disinfected, and not to allow me to come near Talyk's body, or touch anything in my aunt's room. Then she told her that as soon as the coffin was delivered, she should immediately put Talyk in the coffin and arrange for a burial, because of the strict

regulations prohibiting keeping someone who had died from the infectious disease in the home.

My mother was in a panic, "How can we bury Talyk without his mother?"

My father made a decision, "We have to notify Nyusya immediately to return home!"

Indeed, as the doctor said, early in the morning, the mine administration sent men with big workhorses and sleighs to pick up the doctors and other employees to take them to the hospital and to other offices. When the men arrived in the hamlet, my father asked them to drop him at the post office so he could send a telegram to Nyusya in Kharkov. Knowing how important the aspirantura was for her sister, my mother decided to send her a straightforward message: "Talyk died from fulminant diphtheria morning after your departure. Confirm immediate return home. Tonya."

The woman who took care of Talyk returned from work and found my mother in tears. She couldn't believe that Talyk had died so quickly, and now the two of them were crying. Together they washed Talyk and dressed him in his best outfit. Before the little coffin arrived they removed everything from the small storeroom,<sup>2</sup> and put two chairs there on which the men put a little coffin.

All this time I was not allowed to come out of our room and I watched what was going on from the semi-open door. I saw how they were draping the coffin with the lace curtains that they had removed from the windows in my aunt's room. Then the woman put Talyk's little pillow there and my mother gently placed Talyk in the coffin and covered him with more lace curtains.

This was the first time that I had seen what happens when somebody dies and I was curious and at the same time afraid, because of many scary things I heard from my playmates about the dead. Before closing the door of the storeroom, my mother called me to come closer to see Talyk for the last time, and to say good bye, and to blow a kiss to my little cousin. My fear disappeared when I saw Talyk lying peacefully in the coffin all adorned with the lace. He looked to me like he was sound asleep.

Our neighbor doctor pleaded on behalf of her colleague with the hospital administration and received their permission to put Talyk's coffin in the hospital morgue for at least forty-eight hours to give time for his mother, Doctor Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya, to arrive. Late in the afternoon the sled from the hospital arrived, and I heard as the man who came to take the coffin was nailing the lid shut. Then I saw how he, with the help of my father, was bringing it outside. I didn't understand at that time that Talyk was gone forever.

My father went to the post office one more time and mailed a second telegram to Nyusya. The next day passed and there was no answer from her. Meanwhile it became known that the blizzard had formed enormous snowdrifts and accumulated so much snow on the railroad tracks that for two days railroads in the whole region were at a standstill. The passengers were stranded in cold railroad stations' waiting rooms and halls impatiently waiting for the main tracks to be cleared. Therefore, my mother and father assumed that, either Nyusya was also sitting in some station unable to reach her destination in Kharkov, or that the telegraph lines were damaged by the snowstorm and the messages could not get through.

Forty-eight hours of keeping Talyk's coffin in the hospital morgue went by, but there was no answer from Nyusya confirming her arrival. My mother received from the

hospital a notice that they had kept Talyk from burial for the maximum amount of time allowed by the regulations for contagious diseases, and that they had to bury him immediately at the hospital cemetery.

My mother sent my father again to mail a third telegram. The next morning we received a telegram from Nyusya: "Departing immediately. Wait. Do not bury. Nyusya." She arrived late at night on the same day. She was devastated when my mother told her that Talyk was already buried. She burst out in tears and sobbed, "I want to see my son for the last time. I want to see him... I need to see him..."

We called our neighbor doctor, who gave her a tranquilizer and reassured her that tomorrow morning she might petition a sanitary inspector to open the grave. That is exactly what Nyusya did. She probably would have not received this authorization had she not made it clear to the inspector that Talyk was a son of Commissar Yan Ryapo, a well-known figure in the Ukraine, and that she wanted to make a photograph of the child in the coffin to send him.

With an official authorization in her hand, she rushed to the village to call on a photographer, who came with her to the cemetery and made a picture of Talyk and Nyusya. I remember well this large photo of my aunt Nyusya sitting or kneeling near the open coffin placed on the snow near the open grave and looking at Talyk's face, which was still well preserved by the cold.

The sudden death of her son Talyk was a deep tragedy for my aunt Nyusya. She resigned from her position as an eye doctor in the hospital in Snyezhnoye and moved back to Kharkov. There she had a nervous breakdown and her doctor suggested she not pursue the *aspirantura* and graduate studies, which would have produced more tension on her nerves. Instead, he suggested that she needed to distract herself, completely change her way of life, maybe travel, or find some challenging activity that she could enjoy. I assume that Yan Ryapo, who was a Commissar of Popular Commissariat of Education of Kharkovsky Province, helped her find a position as an eye doctor with the teams of medical expeditions in the remote areas of the Soviet Union that were organized by the Popular Commissariat of Health in Moscow and had a division in Kharkov. Very soon she began a very interesting and challenging career.

She established her home base in Kharkov in a very good part of the city. She had one room in a two-room apartment with another couple, and they shared an entrance hall, kitchen, and bathroom. The expeditions were usually from several months to more than one year long, with periods of several months in between for rest and preparation for the next expedition. She was involved in these medical expeditions for many years and traveled mostly in the remote areas of the Soviet Union, where there were no hospitals and they had a field hospital in a big tent. I remember that she recounted about working on the medical program that was attempting to eradicate the epidemics of trachoma and the blindness resulting from this disease common among the peoples of the remote regions in the Asiatic part of the country where there were still many nomadic tribes—the Soviet Republics of Turkmen, Kazakh, Uzbek, Tadzhik, and Kirghiz. And I remember receiving a package from her with pine nuts from somewhere in the Baykal<sup>3</sup> region.

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1. See the chapters "Anna Gavrilovna Berezhnaya" and "Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria Outbreak."

2. It was the unfinished bathroom in the apartment.

3. Baikal Lake is located in the southeastern part of the Soviet Union bordering Mongolia.

## Sharing The Apartment

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and Orest M. Gladky

After my aunt Nyusya moved back to Kharkov<sup>1</sup> her room was immediately assigned to a Jewish couple. I don't remember their name or what the husband's occupation was, but he was employed somewhere in the mine's office. He was much older than his wife, but he allowed her to make all the decisions about their apartment and household matters. His wife didn't work and stayed at home.

She was a woman of below average height and somewhat plump on the soft parts of her body. Her voluminous hairdo of bleached blond hair was showing a reddish origin at the roots. She had a light complexion and used unusually for those times heavy make-up to hide the rusty freckles on her nose and cheeks. Because of the obviously bleached color of her hair, right from the first day, my father jokingly named her Blondy; and from then on, when we talked about her among the three of us, we called her by this name.

Before moving in the apartment Blondy had requested that the woman<sup>2</sup> who lived in our kitchen be removed from there and sent to live in the workers' barracks, as she stated, "Where she belongs." Then Blondy settled firmly in the kitchen, as it was her second room. Only late in the afternoon, when my mother was returning from the *Gorpromuch*, Blondy retired to her room, leaving the kitchen for my mother to cook and for us to have supper at the kitchen table.

The winter and spring months passed without any incidents and it seemed that sharing the apartment with the Jewish couple was not as difficult as we had expected after Blondy chased away the poor woman who lived in our kitchen. However, when the elementary school closed for the summer vacations and I remained at home, while my parents were still teaching in the *Gorpromuch* and the *Rabfak* where there were special summer sessions, the situation suddenly changed.

From the time we lived in that apartment, I always played with my friends in the hall and in the kitchen. Therefore, when the school summer vacation started, the first day I stayed at home, I marched into the kitchen and accommodated myself at the kitchen table to sew for my Pupsyk doll. Blondy looked at me with surprise and told me, "Go and sew in your room."

"I always sew in the kitchen, because I need to have a table," I answered.

"Then put your stuff in your room now and come back here to sew when your mother is cooking in the afternoon."

"But I want to sew now!" I explained.

"Now, go and play outside," she ordered me sternly.

"Why can't I stay here? It is our kitchen too!" I protested.

"You are disturbing me here!" she replied, raising her voice.

"No! I'm not disturbing you. I am sitting quietly and sewing. You don't need the whole table for yourself." I was not giving up my right to be there.

Blondy lost her patience listening to my reasoning and, without saying one more word, she grabbed my doll and the pieces of fabric that I had on the table and threw them in the hall on the floor. I ran after her screaming. As I collected my doll from the floor, Blondy quickly returned to the kitchen and locked the door.

I began to bang at the door screaming, "Open this door! Open this door!" But after a while I had to give up.

That afternoon I complained to my mother about how I had been treated by Blondy. My mother diplomatically expressed her dissatisfaction with the way Blondy treated me. Blondy justified her behavior by accusing me of being impertinent and not obeying her orders. My mother didn't want my father to be involved in this matter and agreed to Blondy's demand, that I be banished from entering the kitchen during the day, under an excuse that I was disturbing her while she was cooking. When my mother told me that, I felt that she had wronged me too.

Suddenly I was deprived of a part of my living space. Now I was confined to playing only in the hall. But not long after this incident in the kitchen, Blondy began to object to my bringing my friends to play with me in the hall, because we made too much noise and she had headaches from it. She would come out of the kitchen and snap at us and order my friends to leave. This time I complained about it to my father and he told me, "Don't pay any attention to that artificial blonde! You may play in the hall as you always did." But my mother, instead, said that she would talk to Blondy and reason with her.

Reasoning didn't help the situation at all, because Blondy insisted that she didn't want children in the apartment. My father was ready to start an argument with her, but my mother didn't want any more problems and was able to persuade him not to get into a fight; after all Blondy's husband was a member of the Bolshevik Party and, who knows, he might have some connections that could cause other problems for us. Listening to what my parents were saying, I figured out that they were on my side but were afraid to defend me because of Blondy's husband. But I decided not to give up easily.

The next time Blondy told me to get out of the hall I defied her, "My father told me that I can bring my friends to play here! You are not my mother to tell me what I can or cannot do!"

"You wry-mouthed girl!" she screamed at me in a shrill voice. All of you get out of here!"

My friends retreated to the porch and she chased them outside and locked the entrance door. I began to cry as loud as I could.

She grabbed me by my arm and pushed me in my room, repeating the offending name again, "You wry-mouthed girl! Get into your room and stay there!"

I opened the door and, remaining in our room, threatened her by screaming with all my might, "You just wait, I will tell my mother that you call me 'wry-mouthed!' I will tell my father, too!"

That evening after I told my parents what had happened and they confronted Blondy and had a big quarrel with her and her husband.

My mother told her, "Aren't you ashamed to hurt an afflicted child by offensive name-calling? Think how you would feel if your child had a physical defect and people

called him insulting names.” My mother’s words didn’t make any impression on Blondy.

Instead, she had a nerve to tell her, “If you don’t like to live here, you should apply for a transfer to another apartment.” After this happened, the relationship between the families became very tense and I had no other choice but to obey Blondy’s restrictions and to give up playing in the hall with my friends.

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1. See the chapters “Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria Outbreak” and “The Raging Snowstorm.”

2. See the chapter “Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya.”

## Exploring New Places and Activities

By Olga Gladky Verro

That summer my friends and I were also one year older and we began exploring new places in our hamlet that had been of no interest to us the previous year.<sup>1</sup> I remember that one day we went all the way to the coal mine to watch how a very long conveyor belt, like a monstrous shiny black snake, was coming out of the mine bringing out coal on top of a dull black hill formed by the discarded mining rock. On both sides of the conveyor, the whole length of it, were many women standing close to each other. Their hands and faces were blackened by the coal dust; the kerchiefs covering their heads were of an indefinite dark gray color—faded from sunlight, bad weather, and repeated washing. With the constant motion of both hands the women selected the pieces of dull black rocks and threw them behind on the hill, thus cleaning the coal from impurities. At the end of the conveyor belt the remaining shiny anthracite fell into a small metal cart placed beneath it. When the cart was heaping-full, the two women pushed it away on the sidetrack and placed another empty cart under the conveyor belt. They pushed the full cart on the narrow rails to the edge of the rock mound, turned the cart over, and allowed the anthracite to pour down on a slide into the open railroad platform car standing below.

When we were returning home after our excursion to the mine, one of the older more experienced girls commented, “Now it is hot to stand there all day long, but it is worst in the winter when it is snowing and cold wind is blowing!”

Another place that we visited often that summer was the miners’ club. For a couple of weeks there was going on a big event called *chystka*, or a purge of Bolshevik Party members. It was an unusual and a sorry spectacle that many people from our hamlet and vicinities came to watch. To be able to sit in the front row and see what was going on, we had to come very early in the morning.

In the middle of a bare stage was a long table and behind it sat several very important looking men and one woman—the inquisition tribunal of the Bolshevik Party. One of them would call a name and ask the party member to come to the stage; unceremoniously, the order was given to put his or her Bolshevik Party membership card on the table and then to stand on the left side of the stage—ahead of the table and sideways to the public and to the tribunal.

Each inquisitor would ask questions and order the victim to confess about such things as, "What was the social status of your parents before the revolution? And your spouse's parents?"

Then another one would ask, "What were the previous places of your residence?"

And the woman was always asking, "What activities were you involved in the ranks of the Bolshevik Party?"

There were many other questions that we, children, could not understand. One thing was clear to us: those men or women were interrogated about something that either they, or their parents, had done wrong and that they had to confess to in front of all those people in the audience.

Some of them were soft-spoken, shy, and remorseful in admitting some shortcomings of what was expected of them as members of the Bolshevik Party. Some of them were admonished and asked to improve themselves and their party membership cards were returned to them. The others boldly declared repentance for their political sins, or for the sins of their parents. Their party membership cards were withdrawn and they were declared "expelled from the party."

The most interesting to watch were those who couldn't find words to answer; they would gesticulate profusely with their arms, hit their chests with their fists, or cry aloud and ask their stone-faced accusers for forgiveness for their political sins.

Then there were those who would come on the stage and throw their party membership card on the table. Some would say with defiance, "Here it is! You may have it!" and leave without submitting themselves to the interrogation; others would just turn around and leave without saying a word. It was a real-life drama and the performers were real people in distress who, against their will were forced to humiliate themselves in public. Walking home from the miners' club, my friends and I exchanged our impressions and feelings by sympathizing with the victims and we openly expressed our hatred of the inquisitors.

Another episode that left the most profound impression on me for many years to come also took place in the miners' club. One day my friends came calling on me, "We saw so many people walking toward the club. Something interesting must be going on up there. Let's go and see!" When we arrived, there was a long, slowly moving line of people waiting to enter the club.

We waited in line with adults in front of and behind us. We didn't know what they were waiting to see. We heard them talking in subdued voices about some very well-known man on the mine, a Bolshevik, and some were guessing about who would take his place in the party.

When we entered the club, I saw that it was decorated with many red flags and on one side there stood a small group of people, mostly men, who must have been very important, because we heard the adults near us whispered their names, "Look so-an-so is here..."

"That one is also here..."

"That's his wife and that one is his son..."

From our group of children I was the first standing behind the adults obstructing my view. Unexpectedly, in front of me, all draped in red satin, appeared a long coffin, the edges of which were at the level of my shoulders. As I was pushed forward by my friends, I suddenly saw the face of a dead man so close to my face that I could clearly

see the small sweat drops on his forehead and cheeks and the short hair sticking up from the yellowish-gray skin above and below his purple lips.

This short but horrible vision of a corpse's face made me shiver all over and remained imprinted in my memory. I continued to see it in front of me long after I was outside of the club. From that day on, I began to be afraid to be alone in a dark room at night and in all poorly lighted places, where I feared that a corpse with that horrible face could be lurking in the darkness. I was not able to get rid of that corpse's vision for many years to come.

Now that I was not able to bring my friends in the house, I often stayed in our room and tried to find something to do. One rainy afternoon, I opened some desk drawers; my attention was attracted by my father's razor, which my father always warned me not to touch, because it was "very sharp," and that I "could cut myself." "Well," I thought, "I would like to try how sharp it is. I will be very careful in handling it". With great precaution, I took the razor out of its box, came close to the window, extended the blade, and admired its slick shiny surface.

Then I placed the razor on the windowsill and went around the room looking for something hard that I could try to cut. I thought, "A chair? A table? N-o-o, father would quickly detect the nicks on them." I returned to the window and put my hand on the painted windowsill that felt smooth under my fingers. "Yes! I can try it here somewhere close to the end of it, where it will be less visible". I placed a blade almost perpendicular to the surface and chipped a piece of dry paint, then another piece, and one more, until enough wood was exposed. Now I was able to try the razor by cutting thin shavings of wood, until the blade got stuck in the wood grain and I had to extricate it. The edge of the windowsill looked uneven and I began to smooth it from the opposite direction until it looked good to me. I cleaned all the paint chips and wood shavings from the floor, placed the razor back in the box and in the desk's drawer.

In the evening I carefully watched my parents to see if they would come close to the windowsill, and I fell asleep sure that my "testing" remained undetected. Early in the morning my father got ready to shave. He brushed a soap foam on his face and, with the first stroke of the razor screamed, "Tonya!" Then he asked with an angry voice, "Did you touch my razor?"

"No," replied my mother. "What is the matter?"

Meanwhile my father was carefully inspecting the blade against the light from the window. "I sharpened it only a few days ago and now it looks like a saw blade!" protested my father. Then he had a hunch; he came close to my bed where I was quietly dressing, and asked me with a stern expression on his face, which meant he expected me to tell the truth.

"What did you do with my razor, Lyalya?"

I knew that my father wouldn't punish me if I told him the truth, and I replied with innocence, "I only tried to see how sharp it was."

"What did you cut with it?"

"Only a little bit on the corner of the windowsill." I got to the window and showed him my masterpiece.

My father looked at me with desperation, "Didn't I tell you that you should not touch the razor?"

"Yes," I answered, "you told me that it was very sharp and that I could cut myself.

But I was very, very careful in handling it and, as you can see," and I showed him both sides of my hands, "I didn't cut myself."

"Don't you know that the razor is used only for shaving? It is not for cutting wood, or meat, or anything else!" reproached me my father. "Now I have to go to work unshaven, because it would take me probably more than one hour to sharpen the blade. Remember from now on not to do anything with my razor again!"

"Yes, Papa..." I promised.

Another episode that I remember well—because my father reminded me about it very often—was about his watch. It was an old wristwatch that had been giving him problems for some time and he often repaired it himself using the smaller blade of his pocketknife as a screwdriver. He allowed me to watch him and, in doing it, he used to explain to me what each part did. When I asked him when I could have my own watch, he told me, "When I buy a new watch for myself, I will give my old watch to you."

I didn't have to wait long, because that year he indeed bought a new watch and solemnly presented his old one to me. It was still working and I proudly wore it, although it looked huge on my small wrist. One day it stopped again and I decided to repair it myself without waiting for my father. "After all, I thought, I saw my father doing it so many times, I know what I should do to repair it. And I know how to use his old pocketknife to remove the screws."

I accommodated myself standing on my knees on a chair near the window so I could see better and began to "repair my watch."

I carefully opened the back lid with the dull side of the blade and saw that the little wheels were not moving. To start them I tried to touch them with the point of the blade, then gently shook the watch as I had seen my father do. It didn't help.

I proceeded to the next step used by my father and unscrewed several tiny screws holding one part and saw underneath some more wheels. I was not able to start moving them either. I was carefully collecting all parts and screws on a piece of paper placed on the windowsill, as my father used to do. I continued to remove one screw after another and collect parts until the spring jumped out and rolled on the floor. I decided to put it back, but no matter how I tried, I was not able to push it back in place. "Well," I thought, "I better leave it all as it is for my father to put it back together."

When my father came home I told him proudly, "Papa, my watch stopped and I tried to repair it myself. But there must be something broken in it, because it didn't start. I was waiting for you, Papa, to help me, because I was not able to put back the spring."

My father looked at the disassembled watch and its scattered parts and exclaimed in disbelief, "What have you done to my old watch?"

"It is not your watch anymore, it is my watch," I protested. "You gave it to me!" Then I justified my actions, "I saw you many times, how you repaired it. I thought that I could do it too. I knew that you would be very proud if I repaired it all by myself!"

After such convincing explanation, my father couldn't find words to argue, or to scold me. He just took a little box and collected what he could salvage from the parts and screws. When I was already in bed, I heard him talking to my mother in a subdued voice, "I have to find some construction kit for our daughter to keep her hands busy; otherwise, one day when we return home we might find our bed taken apart."

Indeed, not too long after this happened, my father bought a present for me. It was a large "Constructor Kit" with all lengths and sizes of metal plates with perforated

holes; then there were axles, wheels, brackets, screws, nuts, washers, screwdriver, and an instruction booklet showing how to make many kinds of projects, from simple carts to cranes. It was the smartest thing that he could do to keep me out of trouble. It kept me busy for hours, putting together not only items shown in the instructions, but I made numerous items of my own invention and proudly presented them in the evening to be admired by my father, who praised me for my good work.

Another activity that I continued to be busy with was to sew for my Pupsyk. My problem was the scarcity of fabric remnants. Occasionally I would go in the back of the hamlet houses to search in the garbage piles for discarded scraps of fabrics, bring them home, wash and iron them, and make a new outfit for my doll. I had a small plywood toy suitcase in which I carefully preserved all my creations.

When my aunt Nyusya left, she gave me her box with thread floss and yarns and I used them to embellish the doll's clothes with embroidery and crochet. Most ideas came from my mother's Women's Journal and I adapted them to my miniature creations. It was an outlet that compensated for my desire to have many pretty clothes, which I imagined I was able to have, as I admired them in the children's fashion section of the Women's Journal.

The reality was that fabrics were hard to find and, when the miners' cooperative store would receive a small supply, one had to buy what was available at that time. Therefore, both my mother and I had a limited wardrobe mostly of practical everyday and school clothes and one festive dress for which somehow my mother was able to find the fabric.

Having had only a few nice dresses as I was growing up, I remember most of them. I remember even the fine details of one beautiful dress that I had from the time I was about five-and-a-half years old. This dress was gathered around the oval yoke and fell loosely around my body. It was made from fine white batiste and had a row of white daisies embroidered with raised satin stitches all around the yoke. The cuffs of the short sleeves and the wide hem were adorned with the drawn thread hem finish. My aunt Tanya, who was a very refined embroiderer, did the embroidery. My mother, however, had to take the embroidered fabric to the dressmaker to sew the dress.

I remember that on those occasions when my mother allowed me to wear that dress, she also gave me a white slip finished with a narrow lace and made especially for that dress. She used to tie a wide white satin ribbon in my hair and I also had white socks and wore sandals. When I was all dressed up I felt ecstatic and kept my head high; knowing that I looked pretty, I imagined that everybody was admiring me.

One day, my mother dressed me up in my white dress and took me to the photographer to make a picture. There was a fancy chair that I wanted to sit on. Well, the photographer had his own ideas about how he wanted me to pose for him, just sitting on a stool near the small table and holding my hand against my cheek. This put me in a sulky mood and it was preserved forever in that photograph.<sup>2</sup>

Another nice dress that I remember was made from red marquisette with small white polka dots. There was enough of that fabric left over for me to make a matching dress for my Pupsyk. And when I wore that dress I took my doll with me to show my creation.

When I was about eight years old and could read well, I crocheted from pink silky rayon yarn a summer hat<sup>3</sup> for me, following the instructions printed in the Women's

Journal and then made a miniature version for my doll.

In the wintertime I usually wore flannel dresses with sweaters over them and heavy cotton stockings held up by elastic garters around the legs. I don't remember much about the kind of shoes I had, but in the summer there were mostly sandals. In the winter, I wore either laced shoes with rubber galoshes over them in bad weather. Or when the snow was frozen, I wore thick felt boots called *valenky*.

All my winter coats had quilted lining. They were all made from my father's old and faded wool suits that my grandfather Berezhnoy ripped apart, turning the wrong side of the fabric out, and tailoring straight coats for me. He did it during our summer vacations, when my mother and I were coming to Slavyansk Kurort.

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1. See the chapters "Sharing the Apartment " and "My Childhood in the Hamlet of Snyezhnoye."
  2. From the photograph of Olga Gladky made in 1928.
  3. From the photograph of Olga Gladky made in 1931 in the forest near the hamlet of Snyezhnoye.

## Digging Into My Father's Past

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

One day at the end of summer 1931 I was surprised that Blondy with whom we shared the apartment completely changed her behavior toward me. She stopped calling me names and even invited me to come and sew in the kitchen, showing her interest in my work. When she found out that I collected discarded fabric scraps from the refuse piles, she went in her room and brought out a bundle of remnants and shared some of them with me. For me it was a treasure-trove; there were pieces of beautiful lace, decorative trimmings, and most of all a variety of fabrics, some of them very unusual silk, brocades, and pretty prints. I was ecstatic to see all those riches and my mind started to work on various creations for my doll Pupsyk.

I was also very pleased that Blondy became very kind to me and talked about herself when she was young, about her grandparents, where they lived and how she loved them. And she made me talk about my grandparents too. I told her that I never knew my grandmothers, because they died before I was born.

"Are your grandfathers alive?" she asked me almost casually and in a pleasant voice.

"Dyedushka Berezhnoy is alive. Dyedushka Gladky died not long ago."

"Oh, what a pity!" she expressed her sympathy. "Why did he die?"

I explained, "He had tuberculosis."

"Was he a good grandfather? Were you fond of him?"

"Oh, yes! He was very kind to me when we lived with him."

"Why did you live with him?"

"Because he was sick and my father had to help Vera take care of him?"

"Who is Vera?"

"My father's sister."

"A-a, she lived with your grandfather too?"

"Yes."

"Did you move to Snyezhnoye after your grandfather died?"

"No-o-o, my Papa was afraid that I would catch tuberculosis and sent me and Mama here to stay with my aunt Nyusya."

"That's why you came here?" she asked for my confirmation of her conclusion.

"Tell me what town your grandfather Gladky lived in?"

"It was not a town, but a big railroad station Nikitovka," I corrected her.

"Do you know where your grandfather worked?" she continued to dig further in a casual manner.

"He worked on the railroad telegraph," I replied proudly.

"You are a smart girl," she commended me, "you know the answers to everything."

Then, seeing that I was pleased with her compliments, she asked me, "Do you know if your father lived in Nikitovka too when he was young?"

"Of course, he lived there with his father and mother!" I answered thinking it was a very silly question.

After finding out about one of my grandfathers, Blondy did not lose time and started to ask questions about my maternal grandfather, where he lived, what his occupation was, and if my mother lived in Slavyansk when she was young.

That evening with great enthusiasm I showed my parents all the scraps Blondy gave me, and told them about how she invited me in the kitchen, and how she was very kind to me, how she talked with me for a long time. My mother right away became suspicious of this sudden change in Blondy's attitude toward me and questioned me, "What did she talk with you about?"

"Well, nothing special," I replied candidly. "She told me about her grandparents and asked me if my grandparents were alive. Then she wanted to know where they lived and where they worked. Then she asked a very silly question; she asked if you lived with your parents when you were young!"

"Did you answer all her questions?"

"Oh, yes! Blondy told me that I was very smart girl and that I knew everything."

Later, when we all were in bed and my mother assumed that I was asleep, I heard my parents exchange their opinions in a very low tone of voice. My mother asked my father, "Did you hear what Blondy wanted to find out from our daughter?"

"Yes, I heard it," he answered.

"Do you think she is plotting to drive us out of our room?"

"I think your suspicion is right," he replied.

After a moment of silence, my mother added, "It seems not to be a simple coincidence. Probably, she is expecting a baby and needs a room for a nanny."

"Ya-a," confirmed my father.

"What a cunning woman she is, using an innocent child to get the information."

"It sounds like she is preparing leads for her husband to dig into our past," my father remarked.

"Your past," clarified my mother.

"No, our past," he corrected her, "because she inquired about your father too." For a while they were silent and then my father asked, "Do you think it's time for me to

start looking for a position somewhere else?"

"It would not do any harm, just in case it will be needed," agreed my mother.

"I shall inquire right away at the Regional Commissariat of People's Education," my father replied.

I fell asleep trying to figure out the meaning of my parents' conversation. In the morning my mother warned me to be careful and not to talk too much with Blondy when she asked about our relatives. But Blondy didn't approach me anymore; probably she had found out all the information she needed and wasn't interested in friendly conversations with me after that.

As the school year began, I was coming home when my mother was also returning from *Gorpromuch*, and Blondy was disappearing in her room leaving the kitchen to my mother.

During that year of teaching at the Rabfak, my father had a very good reputation as a teacher of biology and chemistry. Not long after the school year began, the Rabfak director appointed him also as an assistant director for the curriculum when that position suddenly became vacant.

The person who held that position was driven out by party organizer, called *partorg*, Comrade Perekotiyenko, who was also teaching communist Bolshevik Party history at the Rabfak. He made an application for this position and had great hope he would be appointed in his place. He was convinced that, without any doubt, as a Bolshevik Party member he would be appointed. There were rumors that he anticipated that he would finally be able to attach a title of "Assistant Director" to his name and to move one step forward toward higher positions in the educational bureaucracy.

To his surprise, after he worked so hard to make that position available for himself, his application was rejected by the Rabfak director and by the Regional Commissariat Of People's Education office. It was officially stated that he was lacking minimal level of education required for curriculum planning, scheduling, and coordination of courses, teachers, and students. Unofficially, it became known that he also could not be appointed to this position because everybody knew about his insolent and uncompromising character; his constant fault finding in everyone and in everything would be disruptive to the normal functioning of teachers and students at the Rabfak.

Therefore, when my father was appointed to this position, he instantly was perceived by Comrade Perekotiyenko as his personal enemy and became a target for his fault finding and carping. I don't know exactly what kind of problems he gave to my father—probably they were beyond my child's comprehension. But I remember very well how often my father complained to my mother about "that damned Bolshevik Perekotiyenko," who was constantly bothering him with all kinds of complaints, obstructing his decisions, and reporting on him to the Rabfak director. And when the director's response to his complaint did not satisfy his demands, he would go grumble to the office of Regional Commissariat Of People's Education.

After a few incidents, the Rabfak director told my father, "I am very happy with your professional performance and I told the superiors at the Regional Commissariat about this several times." He reassured my father, "Don't you worry about Comrade Perekotiyenko's complaints, because I and the Regional Commissariat know he is an empty-headed troublemaker, and we are all used to dismissing his complaints as a mere nuisance. Please, don't you worry, Orest Mikhailovich," he told my father, "I don't

intend to lose another assistant director on the account of that blabbermouth.”

Therefore, my father was annoyed by trivial complaints from comrade Perekotiyenko, but he didn't feel any real threat of losing his position on his account. However, both my father and mother had a strong intuition that Blondy's motives in trying to get the information from me about my grandparents and where they lived were suspicious. It sounded like she wanted to find out something about their past. And it was more likely that Blondy's husband could easily succeed in this task, because he was an educated man and, in addition, he had good connections in the Bolshevik Party's Jewish circles.

## The Extraordinary Meeting

As Remembered by Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Toward the end of the 1931-32 school year at the Rabfak I began to detect more and more warning signs and they were becoming more obvious; I knew that the time of reckoning with my past was coming closer and closer. By this time I had already learned to feel intuitively all those symptoms that usually preceded my exposure as the “enemy of the people.” On those occasions I would sharpen my perception of warning signals to various unspoken indications and would awaken my vigilance by listening carefully to every word of the students and faculty who were Bolshevik Party members. And I took seriously all hints from sympathetic persons.

One evening after a faculty meeting, as I was on my way home, one of my colleagues casually passing me on the street told me, “You know, Orest Mikhailovich, just between us, you understand that this is for your ears only... But I felt that you should know this. I overheard that somebody is asking questions about your past. Be careful!”

“Really?” I replied without surprise in my voice and added, “I'm grateful for your warning.”

My colleague asked apologetically, “I hope that you don't mind, if I don't walk with you? People are suspicious. Good night!”

“Of course,” I replied, “I understand. Good night!”

At home I consulted with my wife about it and we decided that I would resign at the end of the school year, which was only two weeks away.

A few days later, another teacher who was always friendly with me asked me secretly, “Have you heard the rumors that comrade *partorg* Perekotiyenko has an eye on your position of assistant principal?”

“No, I haven't,” I said with sincere surprise in my voice, “But thank you for telling me about it. If the *partorg* is aiming at my position he would surely find a way to remove me from it. I shall be ready.” And I thought, “That's why my past is investigated”.

I talked about it with my wife late into the night, and it seemed to us that Perekotiyenko was too stupid to find anything compromising about me by himself. In

the regional commissariat of education they knew him too well to pay any attention to his stories or to help him with this task. But, if it was true, he would probably seek this position for the next school year. And it was still logical to resign after the school vacations started. It seemed to us that my resignation at that time would be less abrupt and less suspicious.

But the next day it became completely clear to me that it was Comrade Perekotiyenko who was involved in digging into my past. One of my students, a Bolshevik Party member, a simpleton by nature, stayed after class and in an innocent and friendly way asked me, "Comrade teacher Gladky, do you know that we, you and I, come from the same district? You are from Nikitovka, and I am from Bachmut..."

"How did you find out about it?" I asked him in the same friendly tone.

"Well, I don't think there is anything wrong to telling you this. Of course, don't let anyone know that I told you," he said scratching his head. "You see, last night our party activists were talking about some special meeting to be held. It should be some kind of a surprise meeting at the end of the school year. They asked me if I knew your family in Nikitovka, and that I should tell them what I know. I told them that I didn't know your family and had nothing to say. And that was that. Then, this morning I thought that it would be nice to let you know that we came from the same district," explained to me this politically unsophisticated young Communist.

"Yes, comrade, I am glad too to hear that you are from Bachmut. It is a nice town, isn't it?" I replied and added jokingly, "Of course, I will not tell anyone that you told me this and you better not tell anyone either..." The bell called for the beginning of the next class and our conversation ended.

That evening I came home and told my wife straightforwardly our coined phrase for such situations, "It's time to go!"

"But, Orest," she tried to reason with me, "we agreed that less than two weeks are remaining to the end of the school year and that you should finish the year..."

"But I had already inquired at the regional commissariat of people's education about any new openings for the next school year. I hope that before the summer vacations begin they will notify me."

Indeed, during the last days of examinations I was notified that at the Rabfak in the neighboring hamlet of Kisyelyevka there was an opening for exactly the same position as I had here—teacher of chemistry and biology and the assistant director of curriculum. I didn't lose any time and immediately went to Kisyelyevka for an interview with the Rabfak director. Since it was under the jurisdiction of the same regional commissariat of people's education, where they knew about my good performance, they gave me their recommendations and confirmation for my appointment right away.

I decided not to tell my Rabfak director until the last day of school that I would be leaving. Every day I worked diligently from the early hours of the morning late into the night on the end-of-the-year reports, finishing all of them right on time. On the last day of school I came to my office very early and began to clean up my desk. Shortly after my arrival I was surprised to hear a gentle knock at the door.

The head of one of my very good students peeped in and he asked in a hushed tone of voice, "May I disturb you only for a moment, Orest Mikhailovich?"

"Of course, come in, come in. Sit down, please. What I can do for you?" I asked him and pointed to the open drawers, "I am not busy, I am only cleaning my drawers

before the summer vacations."

"Well, Orest Mikhailovich, I really don't know how to start," my student began with hesitation. "I respect you very much and felt that you should know about it."

"If you think that I should know it, then go ahead and tell me," I answered almost jokingly.

"You see," he started with embarrassment, "we were sworn to secrecy by comrade Perekotiyenko..."

"Oh, him! Don't worry, I will keep your secret! What is it?"

"Well, late last night all students who are the members of the Bolshevik Party were called for a secret meeting by comrade Perekotiyenko. After swearing us to secrecy, he told us that he is organizing for tomorrow, that means tonight, an extraordinary meeting of all Rabfak students, faculty, and the miners to be held in the Miners' Club; there he will expose and unmask one of the Rabfak's administrators as an 'enemy of the people.' He said that he received very compromising information from an absolutely reliable source, which had to remain anonymous and could not be revealed under any circumstances, that Rabfak Assistant Director Gladky is a former *byelogvardyeyets* and a *lishenyets*<sup>1</sup>." My student stopped for a while waiting for my reaction.

But I told him only, "Well, go on, go on."

And he proceeded, "You know that comrade Perekotiyenko is our *partorg* and we have to obey his orders if we want to keep our student's stipend intact. So he ordered all of us to be on time tonight in the Miners' Club and sit in the first rows. Then he gave us exact instructions as to how we should loudly support him when he asks from the stage for Gladky's expulsion from his position as assistant director at the Rabfak. At the end he emphasized again that we absolutely should not tell anybody about what will be on the meeting's agenda, explaining that, in order to be effective, his presentation should be a complete surprise."

I commented, "A complete surprise, yah?"

After a short pause the student added, "Oh, yes, the most important thing that you should know is that comrade Perekotiyenko will send students to invite all teachers personally, the Rabfak director and you, Orest Mikhailovich, to attend this meeting as representatives of the Rabfak administration and faculty. Other students will be sent to inform all miners' communist cells to send their members to the meeting."

"Well, well, well," I concluded, "nobody from the higher ups listens to comrade Perekotiyenko's stories anymore. So he decided to force people to listen to him. He needed a bi-i-ig audience."

The student got up saying, "That's all that I came to tell you. I better be going before somebody sees me here. I knew that you are coming to work very early in the morning and are here when the janitor opens the door. I wish, Orest Mikhailovich, that everything goes well for you at the meeting tonight."

"Thank you, my friend, thank you for warning me. At least I will be ready to defend myself," I said to my student, who quickly disappeared behind the door. I swiftly finished collecting my belongings in a box and wrote a letter of resignation.

As soon as the Rabfak director came in, I went to see him with all my end-of-the-year reports under my left arm and a letter of resignation in my right hand. I placed the reports carefully on the director's desk and handed him my letter of resignation.

As the director started to read it, I anticipated his questions by pointing to the file, "Everything is completed, there is nothing left for me to do." And without losing precious time, I asked him decisively, "May I have your permission to leave right away? I am sorry to be in such a hurry, but I need to be in Kisyelyevka today at my new place of employment to be briefed about my duties by my new superior." Then I added, as if trying to justify myself, "You know, vacations are starting and all have so little time on the last day of school."

"Of course, you may leave immediately," the surprised director told me and asked, "But why didn't you tell me earlier that you were planning to quit your position here? I would have understood, with Perekotiyenko giving you so much trouble."

"I didn't want to disrupt a smooth process at the end of the school year. Besides, I was not yet sure if they would hire me over there."

"I will miss you," said the director with regret in his voice, "and will miss your efficiency and precision in your work. Students also are losing an excellent teacher. Well, good luck to you on your new job."

As he shook my hand I said, "I hope you will find another person who will be an even better assistant director than I was. Have a nice vacation. I hope we will see each other during regional meetings the next school year." And I left immediately without saying good-bye to anybody else.

When I arrived home so early in the morning, I told the surprised Tonya our coined phrase, "It's time to go!"

"What happened?" she asked me anxiously. "You were supposed to leave at the end of the day."

I saw my daughter Lyalya looking at me puzzled and trying to figure out what I meant by such a short and mysterious phrase. I told my daughter to go outside and play, because I needed to talk to her mother about some very serious decisions. I saw that she understood from the tone of our voices that something unpleasant had happened to me and, although she was very curious about what was going on, she did not dare complain about being excluded from our conversation, as she usually did on other occasions. But as she was walking out of our room she asked me, "Is it again that damn Bolshevik Perekotiyenko?"

I tried to squeeze a smile and answered, "Who else could it be? Of course, it's him."

When Lyalya was gone, I told Tonya about my student's visit early in the morning and that I gave my letter of resignation as soon as the Rabfak director entered his office this morning. I explained my suspicions further, "I think that there was a well-organized plot between the two comrades Bolsheviks—Blondy's husband and Perekotiyenko—to get rid of me and of us. Perekotiyenko doesn't have brains to find out such details about me. Besides, it was Blondy who found out from Lyalya that my father lived in Nikitovka. The information about me could have been found only over there. My student also told me that this information came from a very reliable source, which could not be named."

"I agree," confirmed Tonya, "it all started here in our apartment."

We decided that I would immediately go to the hamlet of Kisyelyevka and make all the arrangements with the administration for an apartment. Also, I would ask if they still had that opening for a teacher of Russian and tell them that Tonya was available for an interview.

"What shall I say, if the students come here to call you for the meeting?"

"I don't think they will come here. They should go to my office at the Rabfak. The secretary may not know yet that I have resigned and left for good. They probably will leave the message for me with her. What a disappointment it will be for comrade Perekotiyenko not seeing me at the meeting!"

Tonya placed in a small briefcase a change of underwear, socks, and shirts for me and we agreed that I would not come back to Snyezchnoye until an apartment in Kisyelyevka was ready to move in.

We called Lyalya in the room and told her not to talk with Blondy about anything. She felt tension in our voices and asked if her silence was important for my welfare. "Very important," I replied. And she promised to avoid our neighbor.

Blondy didn't see me leaving the apartment that morning. Tonya told me later that she and her husband kept themselves very quiet in their room during the evening, as if expecting to hear my reaction when I returned home from the meeting. Tonya put Lyalya to bed early and an unusual quiet enveloped the apartment. The next morning Tonya gave Lyalya very strict orders not to talk to Blondy about her father's whereabouts, "If she would dare to ask you where your father is, answer that you don't know." Lyalya couldn't figure out what her father's departure had to do with Blondy and asked her mother about it. But Tonya told her only that there was a very serious reason for it.

Besides, Tonya was now on vacation and Blondy couldn't bother Lyalya any more. Blondy didn't ask Tonya anything about my whereabouts—her husband probably knew that I had resigned from Rabfak. Tonya packed all our belongings, getting everything ready for me to move us to our new apartment in Kisyelyevka.

In a few days, as it was planned before all this happened, Tonya and Lyalya departed for the summer vacation to Slavyansk Kurort, as they had every summer. There Lyalya received therapy with hot salty mud applications to the affected left side of her face.

They left the hamlet of Snyezchnoye early in the morning by hiring the man with the horse and carriage to take them to the station at Chistyakovo. Since on their way they had to go through the hamlet of Kisyelyevka, they stopped to see me and Tonya had time to have an interview with the Rabfak director for a position as a teacher of Russian language and literature. With her credentials of several years of experience in teaching adults she had no difficulty being hired on the spot.

We also had time to see where we would live and to see our apartment that was being painted at that time. Tonya was surprised to find out that we would have an apartment with two rooms and a kitchen all for ourselves and asked me several times if I was sure that there would be nobody else sharing it with us.

When our apartment was ready I hired a man with a horse and a cart and went to Snyezchnoye to move our belongings. Our neighbor, a husband of a doctor, saw me and invited me to visit him in his apartment before I left. He said to me that he had something very interesting to tell me, because he had attended that extraordinary meeting in the miners' club. He gave me a complete report with many sarcastic comments about what went on during that meeting and what was said there. I still remember it almost word for word.

Although Perekotiyenko made sure that there were plenty of people at the

meeting, knowing him as a troublemaker no one from the authorities showed up. Besides, this was the last day before the school vacations and everybody was getting ready to leave for somewhere. Blondy's husband didn't go to the meeting either.

From the club's stage Perekotiyenko had made a typical Bolshevik's speech about the "enemies of the people." Then he continued, "They hide their past and meanwhile grab the positions of authority that rightfully belong to the deserving members of the Bolshevik party. That's what happened at our Rabfak."

After a moment of dramatic silent suspense he proceeded to denounce me, "Now is the time to unmask the social status of one of our administrators, Assistant Director Orest Mikhailovich Gladky, who has concealed his past. It was I who was notified by a very reliable source that he is a former *byelogvardyeyets* who fought against us, the Communists-Bolsheviks during the civil war. For this reason he was rightfully deprived of civil rights to vote! Now this *lishenyets* is occupying a post of responsibility to educate you, the workers!"

Perekotiyenko made a sign with his arms to students sitting in the first rows to stand up and said solemnly, "Comrades students, what do you say to this 'enemy of the people?'" Students got up, raised their fisted hands, and threateningly swinging their arms started to shout, "Expulsion! Expulsion! Expulsion!" Some people in the audience joined the students and for a while there was a big commotion and noise in the hall.

Then Perekotiyenko signaled with his hands to the students to sit down and, when the silence fell in the audience, he proceeded with the next step and ordered, "Comrades students and miners, let's vote! All those who are for the expulsion of the Rabfak Assistant Director Gladky from his position at the Rabfak, raise your hands!" All students as they had been ordered, raised their hands. Slowly some hands went up among the miners sitting in the hall.

"The proposition is accepted unanimously!" declared Perekotiyenko. "We will write a report to the Rabfak director and to the regional commissariat of people's education requesting that they fire Gladky."

The well-orchestrated meeting was coming almost successfully to a close when a young woman sitting on the end of the second row got up and asked permission to make a comment. Perekotiyenko recognized her as a secretary of the Rabfak director and, hoping to hear a supportive statement from her, told her to go ahead and speak. It was so unexpected that the audience became very quiet waiting to hear what she had to say. She positioned herself comfortably against the sidewall, making sure that everybody could see and hear her. Then, looking at the stage clearly and simply she asked, "Comrade *Partorg*<sup>2</sup>, don't you know that Assistant Director Gladky is not working anymore at the Rabfak?" To this unexpected comment the audience responded with a roar of laughter.

Without answering her question, the embarrassed Perekotiyenko announced that the meeting was closed while people were already getting up from their seats and starting to move slowly toward the exit. They were all in a happy mood like after an entertaining show, exchanging their comments and telling jokes about Perekotiyenko's bad timing.

When our neighbor finished telling this story, he asked me, "Why didn't you mention to me that you served in the White Army? Maybe we would have found that we served in the same battalion!"

"My dear friend," I told him, "you know very well that one cannot tell these things to anybody. You never know who your neighbor is. And I don't want that you tell me anything about your past either. Let's assume that tomorrow I would be arrested and interrogated, and they would force me to tell what I know about you. I am not a hero. I couldn't withstand torture or a threat to my family if they tried to force me to talk. No, my friend, for your own good, I don't want to know anything about your past. Let's remain friends." And we said good-bye to each other and shook hands, keeping our secrets to ourselves.

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1. An individual who is deprived of civil rights.

2. *Partorg* – acronym for Party Organiser

## Hamlet Kisyelyevka

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In the summer of 1932 I was hired in an administrative position<sup>1</sup> and started my work as an assistant director of curriculum at the Rabfak in the hamlet of Kisyelyevka.<sup>2</sup> One of my major duties was to prepare schedules for all teachers and students for the new school year and to coordinate other educational activities. Although all other faculty members and students were on summer vacation, I had worked the whole summer with only the help of a secretary to get everything ready to open the Rabfak's doors on the first of September. When everything was ready, I took a few days off for a short visit to see my sister Vera in Nikitovka and returned to the hamlet of Kisyelyevka before Tonya and Lyalya returned home from their vacation in Slavyansk.

In the last days of August I arrived back at the railroad station of Chistyakovo.<sup>3</sup> From the station there was no transportation available to the hamlet of Kisyelyevka and I had to walk. It was cloudy after several days of continuous rain and no relief in sight. The leaden sky made everything look gray, people and buildings. The ankle-high soft, watery mud was covering almost completely the only paved road called, *shossay*,<sup>4</sup> that led from the station of Chistyakovo through the center of the town of Chistyakovo, and then through the center of the hamlet of Kisyelyevka to the coal mine named Kisyevlev, which was about a mile from the hamlet and ended near the mine at the ravine.

As I walked through the soft mud, I occasionally found some clear spots with small sharp stones, which I felt under the soles of galoshes covering my shoes. I thought, "How long would my galoshes or the soles of my shoes last before they would be worn out, if I had to walk on it every day?" It was a very reasonable concern. After all, in those days it was not easy to buy new ones.

In the hamlet, on both sides of the road were rows of brick buildings built in a hurry during the recent industrialization period to house the influx of workers and employees to the coal-mining region of the Ukraine. On one side were the so-called *zhyl-co-op*,<sup>5</sup> where white-collar workers, employees, management personnel, and party

officials of the mine were housed. These were three-story buildings with multiple chimneys, some for tiled heating stoves installed in each apartment room, and others for brick kitchen stoves. Many blocks of four multi-dwelling buildings forming large rectangular courtyards followed each other.

On the other side of the road, there were the so-called *shakhtyersky co-ops*, or the miners' co-ops, two-story buildings, with chimneys only for the kitchen stoves, because one central heating system for all buildings was planned, but was never built. Therefore, for heating the miners used cast iron stoves. The facades of those buildings were picturesque in the new soviet style. There was a forest of multi-shaped iron pipes sticking through the windowpanes like branches on the dead trees. From the pipes emanated a dark smoke from burning coal that made strange designs over the surface of the brick walls.

On both sides of the road there was space left for the sidewalks and tree borders. The sidewalk was not built yet, though the construction of the houses had been completed several years ago, and in bad weather one had to walk from the road to the houses through deep, dense mud. As for the trees, they were replanted every year by the hamlet inhabitants during the so-called *subotnik*<sup>6</sup> days, in which every dweller of the apartments had to participate. This replanting was needed, because one could not easily find wood for starting the fires in the stoves, and every winter those young trees were pulled out with the roots by the same inhabitants who planted them.

This new place where my family and I would be living did not make any special impression on me, since I had gotten used to this kind of gray-looking new socialist-style building. However, what was a pleasant surprise for me was to have the whole apartment only for my family. This was a luxury according to the socialist standard. Our apartment consisted of two rooms, a small entrance hall, and a kitchen. Yes, there was also one door to what seemed to be a small closet, which I found out was supposed to have been a toilet, not a bathroom, but it had never been equipped either with plumbing or with fixtures.

Another noted feature of the cooperative housing was that, in order to speed up the construction and reduce the costs, there was no plumbing installed in the apartments for water or for sewer. To supply water for the inhabitants of four three-story buildings surrounding the courtyard, there was one communal faucet in the middle of it.

For some unknown reason or poor planning, the water from that faucet was always running in a lazy, unhurried, thin stream. To get the water, women, men, and children had to stay in line for a long time under any weather conditions—in the hot summer days, in the wet rainy days, or in the cold freezing winter days. Then one had to bring the pails of water—for drinking, cooking, washing, bathing, washing clothes, or floors—all the way up to the first, second, or third floor.

But what goes up, must come down; since there were no sewer draining pipes in the buildings, the used dirty water had to be collected in slop-pails, which had to be brought down to be discarded in the courtyard, supposedly in the open refuse pit.

And as to the elimination of bodily waste, all the inhabitants had to run downstairs from the first, second, and third floors to the outside where in the middle of the courtyard was a long wooden outhouse built over a deep pit. This had to be used by all who lived in that block of four three-story buildings. The outhouse was divided

lengthwise by a thin wooden wall in two parts, one half for men, and the other for women, and on the inside along the dividing wall there was one long elevated bench-like seat with multiple round holes intended for the sitting position. Such luxury was contrary to what was expected by the Soviet “architects.” You also had to forget about the privacy there!

In addition, since nobody was in charge of daily cleaning of the outhouse, most of the time it was unusable between the occasional cleanings with the hoses from a mobile cistern with water and a disinfectant with lime. The stench was so horrible that one could not stay inside for the length of time needed for bodily functions. Since most of the time it was almost unusable, at night some dwellers used the courtyard for this purpose, accommodating themselves wherever they could find a clean place along the buildings’ walls that provided cover from behind.

But most families used the old-fashioned solution to provide for these biological necessities by using a chamberpot and a slop-pail stored in the supposed-to-be-toilet-room and bringing the waste downstairs in the courtyard; it was discarded anywhere that one was willing to carry it. Some would carry it all the way to pour it in a large open refuse pit dug near the outhouse, or splash it inside the outhouse itself, that is if the weather was good. Many others, especially in the cold winter days when the snow was covering up the ground and all the mess, would just pour it right next to the back door entrance of the building.

When the winter was over and the snow melted, in the courtyard and around the buildings there would appear the “flowerbeds” of the smelly “winter flowers.” The whole hamlet would be wrapped up in a smothering stench. The inhabitants who lived, like I lived with my family on the third floor where the smell was considerably diluted with the fresh air coming from the open fields surrounding the hamlet, were lucky.

Electricity was provided, or as it was coined “given,”<sup>7</sup> to all dwellers in a limited quantity for each family and strictly only for lighting purposes. No electric appliances, which were not too many available at that time, were allowed. For heating and cooking all workers and employees received a reasonable amount of coal that was stored in the basement of the building in individual cubicles. Every day one member of the family had to carry up the stairs one or more pails of a local anthracite<sup>8</sup> that would be sufficient for twenty-four hours of burning to keep the fire constantly alive, because wood to start the fire was very difficult to find—it was mostly discarded wood supports from the mine tunnels. Most of the miners brought this wood home from the mine as they changed shifts, while all other inhabitants received it in small, rationed quantities, usually insufficient for the whole cold season.

Hamlet Kisyelyevka was several times larger than the hamlet of Snyezhnoye and it was very close to the town of Chistyakovo, where one could find more services than in the small hamlets. There was a market where the peasants brought some fresh produce, which they were allowed to cultivate on their small lots. And there was a so-called cooperative grocery store that, as a matter of fact, was state-owned. In addition, there was a state-owned delicatessen where one could buy at inflated prices many products considered luxury items that were not available in the cooperative store. We were lucky to live very close to the Rabfak and to the miners’ cooperative store and therefore didn’t have to walk great distances every day.

The Rabfak in Kisyelyevka had such a large enrollment that to accommodate all

students and classes it had to be switched to three shifts and was open from eight o'clock in the morning to nine o'clock at night. Both Tonya and I had to teach some classes during the day shifts and some others during the evening shift, and this was posing a problem of what to do with our daughter at night, because we didn't like to leave her alone in the apartment.

On some evenings our daughter stayed with her girlfriend Tamara, who lived on the same floor in the apartment next door. On some evenings, when she was invited, we allowed her to stay with a girl of the same age, a daughter of a very nice, but aloof and very private Jewish couple who were also teaching at Rabfak and lived in the hamlet not far from us in another building of *zhyl-co-op*.

On those nights that I had experiments or demonstrations in the chemistry or biology laboratory, my daughter stayed with me and observed as I prepared all chemical ingredients and implements or samples before students came into the classroom. I did allow her to help me to bring some implements into class and to stay there to see the experiments and demonstrations. Then during the lecture time she stayed in the laboratory room doing her school assignments or reading books.

Since before the school year started the administration was not able to find a teacher of biology, I had to teach it until a qualified teacher was found. Thus in the beginning of the school year my daily routine at the Rabfak was twelve to fourteen forty-five-minute lectures or laboratory classes in biology and in chemistry and a few hours a day distributed between classes as an assistant director of curriculum.

Later, when a biology teacher was found, I continued the lectures and laboratory in chemistry and the rest of the time occupied myself with administrative duties. In addition, several times a week after the school hours all faculty members had to attend either the obligatory faculty meetings, or workshops on upgrading the political education in a doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, or on the history of the Bolshevik party.

On the days off, Saturdays and Sundays, there were often some kinds of *subotnik*, either for the school, the hamlet, or the coalmine. On those days that we had to help the miners to fulfill their tonnage quota of coal production—always planned by the central Soviet government so high that it was impossible to produce—we had to go down in the mine.

All other workers, employees, teachers, students, engineers, technicians, and even the teenagers had to “obligatory-volunteer” on the days off from their regular occupations to help the miners to reach and to top the target tonnage by ten, twenty, or more percent.

All so-called “volunteers” were organized in small teams of about ten to fifteen persons and their attendance was registered and reported to the party headquarters. They were closely supervised by the appointed Bolshevik Party political ringleaders, such as, *politruk*<sup>9</sup>, *partorg*<sup>10</sup>, and secretary of *profkom*<sup>11</sup> or of a *komsomol*<sup>12</sup> cell.

In addition, that year new directives came from Moscow requiring all teachers to be enrolled in programs upgrading their specialization and eventually in a reasonable length of time to receive teachers' certificates in their respective subject matter. Therefore, both of us, Tonya and I, enrolled in correspondence courses at Moscow Pedagogical Institute in our subject matter divisions—I, in chemistry and biology, and Tonya, in Russian language and literature. During the summer school vacations we had to travel to Moscow and for several weeks take yearly examinations and attend the

required series of lectures.

All hours of our life were scheduled almost minute by minute not only during the school time, but also in so-called free time. Tonya had to get up early and, before school started, walk all the way to the market in Chistyakovo to find some fresh produce and then hurry to be on time for her first class at the Rabfak. Then, after the morning shift, on her way home she had to stop at the miners' cooperative to buy bread and staple foods, whichever were available on the shelves that day, and hurry home to cook lunch and supper so we could finish eating on time for teaching in the afternoon and night shifts.

My morning duties at home included taking the slop-pails downstairs, and bringing up to the third floor the pails with clean water from the courtyard faucet. Then I had to bring the pails of coal from the basement storage. In the winter I had to remove the ashes from all stoves, fill them with fresh coal, and regulate the pipe draft to keep the fire going until we returned home. In the summer I had to prepare the kitchen stove to be ready to start when Tonya returned home to cook.

At the Rabfak, most of the time between day and evening shifts, I had to catch up with some of my administrative duties, or try out some of the experiments in the chemistry laboratory. On the days we received our salary, I usually found the time to walk to Chistyakovo to buy some cold cuts or canned goods and chocolates that the Soviet government allowed us to buy once in a while at inflated prices at the state-owned delicatessen.

Therefore, there was little time left for us to dedicate to our family life and to our daughter. Even at night we stayed late correcting students' assignments and preparing lessons for the next day and, of course, working on our own assignments for the correspondence courses, which had to be mailed on time to the institute. However, this was the time that all three of us were together at home and shared the company of each other.

Lyalya learned very fast to help her mother to correct piles of students' work, especially dictations in Russian, which was the main teaching method used at that time. Lyalya compared the first few papers to the sample with the correct spelling and quickly memorized it—the rest of the papers she corrected from memory. In the evening Lyalya also used to read books and sometimes it was hard to force her to turn off the light when we were going to bed, usually not earlier than midnight.

During the summer vacations, when we had to travel to the capital of the Soviet Union for the summer sessions of students enrolled in the correspondence courses of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute, we used to bring Lyalya to stay for several weeks either with my sister Anya in Taganrog or with Tonya's sister Tanya in Stalino,<sup>13</sup> where she kept company to her cousin Murochka<sup>14</sup>.

Then every summer during the rest of the remaining vacation Tonya and Lyalya went to Slavyansk Kurort and stayed as boarders in a cottage that they had patronized for several years. In the morning Lyalya would have heat therapy with the hot salty mud<sup>15</sup> applications to the left side of her face, and Tonya would take a relaxing bath therapy of warmed saltwater from the lake. During the hot part of the day they rested in the pine forest park, lying in a hammock hung between the trunks of tall pine trees. And toward the evening when the sun was low they went to sunbathe on the sandy beach and to bathe in the Salty Lake. On some afternoons they traveled on the local branch

train called *Vyetka* to the town of Slavyansk and visited Tonya's father, who during their stay at the Kurort usually tailored Lyalya's winter coats from my old suits.

After the first year of teaching in Kisyelyevka, at the end of the summer vacations, when Tonya was returning with Lyalya from Slavyansk to the hamlet of Kisyelyevka, she had a strange encounter.<sup>16</sup> She had just gotten out of the train at the railroad station of Chistyakovo, which was the closest station for both hamlets Snyezhnoye and Kisyelyevka, and was walking through the waiting room when she saw a red-haired woman with a baby in her arms. The woman was smiling and walking toward her calling her name, "Wait, Antonina Gavriyllovna!" Tonya looked puzzled at the woman.

"Don't you recognize me?" the woman asked in disbelief. "I lived in the same apartment with you in the hamlet of Snyezhnoye."

"A-ah," answered Tonya, realizing that the woman was Blondy, "I didn't recognize you. What happened to your hair?"

"Well, now I have a baby and don't have time anymore to bleach my hair," responded Blondy. Then she added in a demure voice, "I am so glad that I encountered you, because I wanted so much to show you my son."

Tonya glanced quickly at the baby saying, "Congratulations, you have a very beautiful baby."

"Yes, yes, he is very beautiful," answered Blondy in a trembling voice and tears in her eyes. Then she asked Tonya, "Do you remember when we quarreled because I was so arrogant to call your daughter with offensive names?"

"Yes, I remember!" answered Tonya bitterly.

"Well, I remember every day what you told me at that time," replied Blondy. "Your exact words were: 'How would you feel if you had a child with an affliction and people called him with offensive names?'"

"Yes, I remember!"

"Well, God has punished me for being cruel to your daughter. Look how God has punished me!" Blondy turned the baby's face toward Tonya and said, "Look at my son's eyes! He was born with walleyes; doctors call it the very fancy name *leucoma of the cornea*. Every time I look at my child I ask forgiveness for my insolence and for the great injustice I did to you and to your daughter!"

"Poor child," said Tonya looking at the eyes of a little boy whose eyeballs were completely covered with a non-transparent white membrane. "Can anything be done for him?" she inquired.

"That's what we are going to find out with my husband in Kharkov. We are going there for a consultation with well known professor."

Tonya saw Blondy's husband near the door to the platform; he was waving to his wife to hurry up.

"Please forgive me for what I have done to you and your daughter," said Blondy, touching Tonya's hand lightly. "Maybe your forgiveness shall bring luck for my son."

Tonya just nodded her head without saying a word. In her heart she was sorry for the little boy, but in her mind she could not erase her bitterness toward this woman, "Yes, God has punished Blondy severely for her injustice to my daughter. Now she knows how I felt when my daughter's face became paralyzed."

Blondy looked at Lyalya and remarked, "Your daughter's face has improved. Did you find some effective treatment for her?"

"Yes," replied Tonya, "applications of warm mud from the Salty Lake."  
Blondy's husband continued to call her, and she left saying again, "Please forgive me..."

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1. Orest M. Gladky, (O. Mikhaylov, pseud.), "Socialistichesky posyelok" [in Russian], MS, TS, 1954, trns. and ed. by Olga Gladky Verro [with additions as remembered by the editor], 1993. Also published in a different form as Orest M. Gladky. (O. Mikhaylov, pseud.), "Socialistichesky posyelok" [in Russian] newsp. *Rossia* No. 8409 (New York: Rossia Publishing, December 3, 1973). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. Hamlet adjacent to the coalmine named Kisyev, in honor of a Bolshevik who earned to have a mine named after him with his political deeds.

3. A railroad station and a town in the coal-mining Donetsk region of Ukraine.

4. Macadam road of small broken stones rolled on earth roadbed.

5. *Zhyl-co-op* - Cooperative dwellings, a misnomer, because they were state property.

6. A day of "obligatory-volunteer" work on projects for public interest, or governmental interest, such as increase in the production of coal, etc.

7. The cost of electricity was included in the rent.

8. Hard coal of best quality because it gives more heat and less smoke in comparison to other types of coal.

9. *Politrak* – acronym for *Politichesky rukovoditel* - Political leader.

10. *Partorg* – acronym for *Partiyny organizator* - Party organizer.

11. *Profkom* – acronym for *Professionalny komitet* - Professional committee.

12. Komsomol – acronym for *Kommunistichesky Soyuz Molodyezhy* - The Young Communists League.

13. Former name Yuzovka, renamed by the Bolsheviks to Stalino.

14. Diminutive nickname of Marianna.

15. Mud taken from the bottom of a Salty Lake.

16. Based on the memories of Antonina G. Gladky.

## My First Friendship

By Olga Gladky Verro

By the time we moved to the hamlet of Kisyelyevka<sup>1</sup> I was nine-and-a-half years old and was attending the fourth grade in elementary school. Until that time I had a group of friends without any special attachment to anyone in particular. Kisyelyevka was a big hamlet with multistory apartment buildings and no place for meeting other children to play outside like we could do in Snyezhnoye. Here the parents who cared for the welfare of their sons and daughters did not allow their children to gather in the staircases of the buildings or in the courtyards. Most of the small children were kept in the apartments and the school age children were allowed to walk to and from school and after were also kept inside.

I had become older and needed a closer relationship with girls my age. Next door to us on the same floor lived a girl Tamara and we became very close friends.

Tamara was only one year older than I, but she was taller and more physically developed. She had beautiful blond hair divided exactly in the middle of her head and

she plaited it in two thick braids. Her fair complexion and rosy cheeks added to her fresh and healthy look and were complemented by her large blue eyes.

She lived with her father, mother, her sister and her husband and their baby son. Although they all worked, they arranged their schedules at different shifts and there was always one adult at home during the day and evening. Her father was an accountant at the mine office and her mother worked in the miners'

cooperative; her sister and her husband worked somewhere else for the mine. Tamara and I did a lot of baby-sitting for her nephew when her sister and mother were away from home.

I remember that I admired their apartment because compared to ours, which had very limited furniture and decorative items, theirs was very attractively furnished with very good quality furniture. The windows had nice white lace curtains. It looked very cozy adorned with the tall leafy green houseplants placed on the floor near the windows and lots of bright red geraniums on the windowsills and on the plant stands. They also had several aloe vera cactuses and they used their leaves to heal all kinds of wounds and infections from splinters, which were very common to get when one handled wood to start the fire in the stoves.

They also had a large semitransparent aquatic plant that resembled a jellyfish and it lived in a large glass barrel filled with water. It was placed near the window so it could get as much sun as possible. This plant was fed with sugar and grew very slowly. It was propagated by taking a small portion of the plant, which had also to include a piece of the dense and cloudy central section, which was called "mother," and placing it in another transparent container with sugared water. The container was kept near the sunny window and fed regularly with sugar. The plant secreted a sour substance in the water making a pleasant drink that the whole family enjoyed and they usually treated their guests by serving it in small glasses. I liked it too, and Tamara served it to me in the evening when I stayed in their home.

Tamara and I walked together every day to our school, which was about fifteen to twenty minutes by foot from our apartment building. The new school was a large brick building built at some distance from the apartment complex and between them was an empty piece of land covered with tall weeds. This land was left for the construction of more apartment buildings in anticipation of further hamlet development. There was also a space left for the sidewalk, which was not done yet. Between the macadam road and a sidewalk-to-be a space was left for planting trees. Running along the sidewalk-to-be, all the way from the hamlet buildings to the school, there was a recently dug deep and wide trench for the sewer or water pipes. Uneven and bumpy mounds of fresh earth were left on both edges of the trench; along it, like a long fat snake squashing the weeds, were huge clay pipes waiting the whole fall and winter to be placed in the trench.

Every day children from the hamlet walked to and from school on the narrow path beaten by many small feet along this ditch between the mounds of earth and the sewer pipes. Children brought fresh dirt sticking to their shoes into the halls of the school and onto the staircases of their apartment buildings. Before entering the apartment we had to remove our shoes and galoshes on the landing and allow them to dry beside the door before cleaning the dirt from them, especially during and after the rain. I always hated to clean my shoes and polish them with the shoe cream, a task on which my father insisted notwithstanding my reasonable protests, "It is all a waste of

time to shine them—tomorrow they will be dirty again.”

Tamara and I walked together to school in the morning and returned together to the hamlet in the afternoon. The rambunctious boys—after sitting several hours at the desks in school—on their way home were playing pranks, pushing each other, running, and teasing the girls, pulling their braids, and calling bad names. We also had our share of boys who targeted us for their pranks and teasing. They called me names—although my facial paralysis had improved a lot—but it was still visible when I smiled. I tried to use the long-learned tactic of ignoring the malicious boys, but they were not content with my silence and would start to push me into a ditch. When I complained to my father that the technique he taught me was not working, he told me, “If they are of the same size as you are, show them that you can defend yourself and fight them back.”

My mother was not happy with my father’s suggestion; she was afraid that boys could push me down into that deep ditch. And she was coming to meet us halfway, although I reassured her that the defense was working and that the boys had stopped bothering me.

But with Tamara things were different; she was afraid of the boys, who felt that they could pull her braids and get away with it. Well, one day when one boy was really nasty to Tamara, would not let go of her braids, and she was screaming, I just couldn’t resist my impulse to come to the rescue of my friend and I got into a fight with the boy. I was almost winning, when his friend came to help him and between the two of them they pushed me in the ditch. My mother was not far away; she saw all that had happened and rushed to help me. Together with Tamara they pulled me out of the ditch. Meanwhile the boys, anticipating trouble after being recognized, ran away as fast as they could.

My mother expected that the boys would take revenge and she came to meet us for the next several days. The boys got used to seeing my mother every day and for a while they kept away from us, finding other victims for their teasing. But when my mother stopped coming, they began to torment Tamara again. She got tired of it and decided to cut her hair<sup>2</sup> short, hoping that there would not be more temptation to pull her braids.

In the evenings, when my father had a chemistry laboratory class at the Rabfak, he took me with him to stay there and allowed me to help him prepare the ingredients and implements for the experiments and demonstrations. I would help him to bring it in the classroom and he allowed me to stay there to watch it. Afterward he gave the lecture part of the lesson, and I would go and sit in the laboratory and work on my homework or read books. During those evenings I learned many chemical principles, names of the elements, the Mendeleev’s Periodic Table, and also learned to handle test tubes and other laboratory implements.

On those evenings when both my father and mother had lectures I stayed with Tamara most of the time, either in their apartment or ours and we were not afraid, because there was always some adult person from her family at home. Sometimes I was invited to stay with one Jewish girl whose parents were also teaching at the Rabfak. But then, my father had to come at night to another building across the muddy courtyard to take me home; this was very inconvenient, especially during bad weather.

My friendship with Tamara grew stronger day by day. We always found something interesting to do together, doing our homework and helping each other in

solving math problems or in writing compositions. Sometimes we crocheted, or drew pictures, or read, or just had a girl's talk, sharing our opinions about teachers and other girls in our school. Tamara also taught me to play a popular card game called *V-Duraka*.<sup>3</sup> My father strongly disapproved my playing cards, which he associated with gambling and considered a waste of time. Therefore, I tried not to engage in this activity. But Tamara liked it very much and when we played it occasionally, I would not tell my father, because I was afraid that he would not allow me to stay with Tamara in the evening.

I remember that one of our cherished pastimes was to look at the pictures in the albums that Tamara's parents allowed us to have only once in a while, because they were kept out of circulation. They had several albums with old pre-revolutionary, multicolored greeting cards, which were considered to be precious collectible items. There were such a variety of them that I was wondering about the messages, meaning, and the reasons why they would send them to relatives and friends; and Tamara's mother explained it to me.

Especially puzzling to me were the cards with the pictures of icons with sad-looking faces surrounded with golden crowns and clothing; also the cards with the winged angels flying in the rosy-blue sky; and those with pictures of colored and decorated Easter eggs in baskets placed on the table near tall *paskha* cakes and long willow branches with just opened silver-white oval plush-like flowers; and those depicting Christmas trees covered with an unbelievable variety of toys and shiny flakes of snow. At that time, the Soviet government had abolished the tradition of having Christmas trees and an ex-tensive campaign was going on in the children's books and journals against cutting the "poor young trees" in the forest.

The only Christmas tree that I remember having was the one my father made for me when we lived in the village of Nizhnyaya Krynka. I remember helping my father to make toys and a chain from colored construction paper and decorating the tree with old wax toys and shiny balls that he inherited from his family since he was the only one who had a child at that time. Since then, I cherished those fragile toys and wrapped them carefully in tissue paper in a large old cardboard box. Occasionally I would open the box and Tamara and I would play with them, admiring the delicate workmanship.

Since that first and last Christmas tree, when I was only four years old, I didn't remember if my parents ever explained the meaning of the Christmas holiday to me. Well, Tamara's mother did her best in telling us about the holy night and the birth of Jesus, but it was too mystical and not clear to me and reminded me of some fables that I had read in abundance.

When I asked my mother to explain to me more about Christmas, she told me that it was an old and beautiful traditional religious holiday, which the Soviet regime had abolished. Therefore, as a teacher it was prohibited to her to talk about the religion; and that if somebody found out that she was teaching her daughter about Christian holidays, it would be considered religious propaganda and she could lose her school employment. "However," she said, "your grandfather is a very religious man and he can explain it to you when we are there next time during the summer vacation."

In addition to the religious kinds of greeting cards Tamara's albums also had many birthday, wedding and mundane occasions cards; I admired the pictures of unbelievably colorful flowers and the children beautifully dressed in fashionable

clothing playing with each other or with their pets; I liked especially the cards with the pictures of the elegant ladies with or without parasols, wearing fancy gowns and large hats decorated either with the plumes of exotic birds, or with delicate flowers, or even with fruits.

The shiny photographs and pictures that were printed in relief mesmerized me. It was the first time in my life that I saw such extraordinary pictures for those times. I could sit and look at them over and over again. The albums were kept in great regard as family heirlooms and we were allowed to look at them only when some adult was home. We were instructed not to touch the surface of the cards with our hands and to turn the pages of the album carefully with the tips of our fingers at the corners of the cardboard pages. And, of course, we had to wash our hands before even asking to look at that marvel of a decadent world of the not-so-long-ago, when our parents could buy, send, or receive them for birthdays and religious holidays. There was nothing of that kind that could be found to buy anywhere in our Soviet times.

Before the school year was over, Tamara's family suddenly decided to move to another place. It must have been some very important reason that made the whole family move from a place where they all had jobs and a decent apartment to live in. I remember my father commenting about it, "Probably her father or grandfather was one of the 'has been' and was close to being exposed."

"Papa what does 'has been' mean?" I asked. "And by whom would he be exposed?"

"It's a long story," replied my father. "It means that he was one of those who before the revolution had been somebody whom the Soviets don't like and they chase them and expose them as so called 'enemies of the people.'"

"Stop it, Orest, stop it!" intervened my mother. "The girl is too young to understand such explanations and may blurt it out to somebody and get you in trouble!"

"Don't you worry, Mama," I calmed her with self-assurance. "I am not a little girl anymore, I understand that Tamara's father is a good man, but the Soviets don't like him. I am not going to tell this to anybody. I am not a stupid to get him in trouble."

Tamara's family shipped their furniture by rail, but they didn't know if they would find an apartment right away in the new place and were not sure where they are going to stay. They were afraid to take with them some small but precious items and asked my mother if they could leave them for safekeeping with us for a few days. Among the items they left with us were a briefcase with some documents, a jewelry box, several albums with family photographs, and those with the heirloom greeting cards that I admired so much. I asked Tamara's mother if I could look at those beautiful cards one last time and promised to wash my hands and be very careful with them. She smiled and nodded her head in a sign of permission, while she was thanking my mother for taking the responsibility for these precious possessions.

That night their whole family slept in their empty apartment on the floor and Tamara slept with me in my bed. We talked late into the night promising each other to write and keep in touch for the rest of our lives. Early in the morning we embraced each other and with tears in our eyes said good-by, sealing our parting with the words, "Remember to write to me."

For several evenings I did nothing but admire the beautiful cards that represented for me the highest examples of art that I had seen in my life. I even dared

to stroke, very lightly the embossed shapes and wondered how they were done. Then I began to imagine what I would do with the cards if they were mine. "Maybe not all," I thought, "maybe just a few of them..." Then I began to look through the albums again, selecting those cards that I would choose if I was allowed to keep them. Then I decided to choose only one card, which I would keep, if they would allow me to keep it as a gift for their safekeeping. And I dared to pull it out of the album. I placed the album on the box containing the other items and put the selected card on top of it. Because the album was not lying level in the box, the card slowly slipped to the floor. As my eyes followed the falling card a thought flashed through my mind, "If I just leave it there on the floor, maybe when they come to take their box, nobody will pay attention to it and it will remain here for me... Then I could 'find it' after they were gone..." I left the card on the floor all night and the day after when I went to school.

When I returned from school, I checked in the room to see if anyone had picked up the box. Everything was there as I left it. I opened the album to the page where I had removed the card and saw an empty space looking at me like a witness accusing me of having done something that my father would not approve of. And I remembered the incident with my toy iron in Snyezhnoye,<sup>4</sup> when my father ordered me to take that iron back to the boy it belonged to. "Papa would definitely question how I got that card when he sees it," I thought. "Or even worse, Tamara's mother could write to my mother that they are missing one card when they see that empty space in the album." The temptation to keep that card was very strong, but the consequences were bothering my developing conscience, and finally the "right" won over the "wrong." I picked up the card from the floor, admired it for the last time, and slowly inserted it in its place in the album.

Soon after, when I was in school, Tamara's brother-in-law came to retrieve the box with their possessions. My mother told my father that he was right about Tamara's father—he had to leave Kiselyevka in a hurry because "they"<sup>5</sup> were after him. When she asked the young man their new address, he told her, "For your sake and for our peace of mind, it is best that you don't know it."

I never received a long-awaited letter from Tamara and was greatly disappointed in what I thought was a friendship for life. When I complained to my mother about it, she only told me, "She cannot write to you because the whereabouts of her father could be traced through her letters. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Mama," I answered, but I was unconvinced by her explanation. "If she really wanted to mail me a letter," I said, "she could have found a way."

My mother replied, "My dear girl, you have yet to learn a lot about what could and what couldn't be done, even if one wanted to do it very much."

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1. See the chapters "Sharing the Apartment" and "Hamlet Kiselyevka."

2. From the copy of photograph of Tamara with Olga Gladky in 1933-34. Photo by Orest M. Gladky.

3. The Game of a Fool.

4. See the chapter "My Childhood in Snyezhnoye."

5. The agents of KGB – acronym of *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Byesopastnosti*.

# On Winter Vacation

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

During the first half of the 1932-33 school year of teaching at the Rabfak<sup>1</sup> in the hamlet of Kisyelyevka,<sup>2</sup> Tonya and I adjusted ourselves to our new place of employment, to our colleagues and superiors, and to the ever-present sniffing Bolshevik watchdogs. I was somewhat puzzled that they hadn't picked up the scent of suspicion toward my past that could have been generated from the meeting in the neighboring hamlet of Snyezhnoye<sup>3</sup> that occurred after my abrupt resignation from the Rabfak. I didn't yet detect any signs that the revelations about my past by the *partorg*<sup>4</sup> Perekotiyenko during the extraordinary meeting there were taken seriously by his superiors.

Then, just one day before the winter vacations at the Rabfak in Kisyelyevka, I encountered our *partorg*, Comrade Katsman, who asked me, "Comrade Gladky, what happened to you in the hamlet of Snyezhnoye?" I knew very well what had happened over there, as I found out all the details of the extraordinary meeting from my former neighbor.

But, since this happened after I had resigned there and quickly left the hamlet, I confidently answered, "To me? Nothing happened to me. But I heard that something happened there after I left. Exactly what happened, I don't know. I think that with your party connections you probably know it better than I.

Surprised with my answer, Comrade Katsman said, "Well, I thought that you knew..."

"No, but I heard about it," I confirmed.

Then, he unexpectedly obliged me with the information, "I can tell you what I know about it. In the Regional Commissariat of People's Education you are considered to be an excellent teacher and an efficient administrator. They have unanimously tabled Comrade Perekotiyenko's motion to his proposition that was the outcome of that tumultuous meeting. He was not able to back up his accusations with facts about you since his supposedly reliable source of this information has been anonymous and never revealed his name to him."

"Ah!" I replied with relief. I looked him straight in the eyes and asked bluntly, "Knowing about this incident, could you tell me, if I may continue to work here after the winter vacation?"

"Yes, yes, of course, you may work here," he replied reassuringly and added, "By the way, you might be pleased to know that Comrade Perekotiyenko applied for the position of assistant director at the Rabfak in Snyezhnoye, but he was not even considered for it by the Regional Commissariat of People's Education."

I explained for the record, "I was the second person whom he pushed out from that position believing that he would become the assistant director of the Rabfak. But everybody knows his limitations."

Although the friendly tone and the straightforward facts presented by the Comrade Katsman were very reassuring, I had a mixed reaction to this conversation. I knew that my employment was depending a great deal on the quality of my work and on my experience and knowledge as a teacher, and especially on my ability to work with

the adult students. For this I could depend on the evaluation and respect from a majority of my students and the teachers who were my subordinates and my friends.

But my employment depended mostly on the people in the Regional Commissariat of People's Education who, without exceptions were all Bolsheviks, and on the three persons here at the Rabfak—the director, the *partorg*, and the *profcom*<sup>5</sup> secretary. They all could do anything with the information about my past at any time and, if they wanted, they could proceed with the further investigation.

The director of the Rabfak appreciated my work and I probably could count on his support as on a rock mountain, if only... he had not been a member of the Bolshevik Party. The *partorg*, comrade Katsman, whose opinion I just heard, was a Rabfak student on the fourth year course and was my student in the chemistry class. His future didn't depend on me in any way, since he would receive his passing grades from any teacher who would come after me, as of his position in the party and not necessarily for his achievement in studies. But I knew that he appreciated me as a teacher. The *profcom* secretary, although a member of the faculty, was also a member of the Bolshevik Party. He was a teacher of Political Science, now better known as "The Theory of Marxism-Leninism and History of Bolshevik Party." From my experience in other places, these teachers had very dogmatic and inflexible characters and this one was not different from the others. However, in my favor was the fact that he wasn't interested to take my position as an assistant director of the Rabfak.

Therefore, in case somebody would find a tangible evidence of my past "sins," there was almost no hope for any support from any of them, contrary to the impression from Comrade Katsman.

My future was beginning to look gloomy again. But I had a glimpse of hope that there was no immediate danger for my dismissal and I had two weeks of vacations ahead of me to evaluate the situation and to make plans for my future.

I picked up my salary envelope at the Rabfak office and went directly to *Rabcoop*<sup>6</sup> to buy a liter of vodka, which I hated to drink and rarely purchased, except in the summer season to make homemade liquor called *nalivka* with fruits. But I was hoping that this time it should allow me for one night to forget until the next morning the problem that I had to face.

When I entered the apartment and placed the bottle on the table, my wife looked at me inquisitively and asked, "What happened?"

I knew that she understood everything and answered, "Nothing, my dear. Everything is fine in this world!"

What else I could tell her in the presence of our daughter, who was then only nine years old. We brought her up protected as much as we could from revealing my past and the reasons for our constant moving from one place to another. We also protected her from the communist influence and propaganda. But she didn't receive the traditional middle class upbringing that my wife and I had.

Most important, she was brought up detached completely from religion, which we as educators could not openly practice; we were instead expected to include antireligious teaching as a part of our curriculum in any subject. In her presence we tried not to talk with nostalgia about the past, which could have made our feelings transparent, and which she could have perceived with her young child's heart. We could not allow her to learn the truth, because in her childish naiveté she could tell her friends

something that should not be told to anybody. Children talk with their friends and answer questions asked by cunning adults. More than once we witnessed that children ruined the lives of their parents with their talk. Our own daughter innocently helped with the inquiry about my past by answering the questions of our cunning neighbor in Snezhnoye.<sup>7</sup>

And this time, my wife and I were suddenly shocked to hear this small girl impulsively answering her mother, "Don't you know, Mama, that Papa drinks only when his heart is heavy?"

"But why should his heart be heavy?" asked my wife and added, "Tomorrow two weeks of winter vacations begins. He should be happy to have some rest. Do you think that maybe he is not happy for some reason with us?"

"No, Mama," blurted out Lyalya with the serious expression in her voice, "it is not with us that Papa is unhappy, but with the Soviet authority, which he doesn't like!"

"What are you making up, Lyalya?!" sharply interrupted her my wife.

"What did it have to do with the Soviet authority?" I injected.

"Don't you dare talk rubbish!" my wife admonished her. If somebody would hear you..."

"Don't you worry about me, Mama! Do you think that I am a small girl that doesn't understand anything? Nobody would hear such things from me!" answered my daughter in a reassuring tone of voice that left no doubt that she meant it.

Conversation stopped at that point, but we understood that in our small quarters we could not hide from our daughter that occasional unfavorable word or comment, nor a sigh, or a furtive glance between us. With her intuition she perceived everything with surprising accuracy. This was the first time she actually vocalized that she understood our aversion to the Soviet authority. After supper I had a glass of *nalivka*, because I really hated to drink vodka, then went to bed and quickly fell asleep.

I started my winter vacation by sleeping until very late in the morning and procrastinating in getting up. Then I heard our dog Knopsyk lazily barking in the hall, then some knocking; my wife opened the door and saluted somebody in a friendly manner. A male voice asked for me. My wife knocked on my door, saying that somebody had come to see me. I noticed that Knopsyk stopped barking at the visitor and my wife's voice was calm; it meant that he was a friendly person. I sat on my bed and invited, "Come in!"

Carefully opening the door entered Maslyeyev, my former student from Rabfak in Snyezhnoye, who now was studying in the Dnyepropetrovsk Mining Institute.

"What a surprise!" I exclaimed as we shook hands and asked him to remove his winter jacket and sit down on the chair.

While I was dressing, Maslyeyev told me that he was re-turning home to visit his family during the winter vacation. He had to walk eighteen kilometers from the station at Chistyakovo to the Coal Mine Number Nine, because there was no other way to get there. He knew from some of his friends that I had moved to the hamlet of Kisyelyevka and decided to stop and visit with me while he rested before proceeding to his home.

My wife prepared lunch and I invited him to share our meal. *Nalivka* had remained on the table from the last evening and we had a small glass before starting the meal. Then, knowing that the miners usually would not refuse a glass of vodka with the meal, I placed the bottle purchased yesterday on the table.

Maslyeyev was surprised to see that I had vodka in my home because my students had never detected even the smell of alcohol on my breath. With the secret watching by the members of the Bolshevik Party at the Rabfak, nobody ever accused me of the sin of drinking. And this increased respect toward me.

"Orest Mikhailovich," Maslyeyev said jokingly, "it appears that you... I mean, you also know how to drink."

"Of course! Why should not I drink a little?" I answered him in the same tone.

"We, students, never could even imagine this about you! We were all convinced that you were a sober, non-drinking man," he confessed.

"Well, Comrade Maslyeyev, life as it is requires that one have a drink once in a while!" I replied.

"Sure, I agree. Sometimes it happens that one has to have a drink," confirmed my guest after the first glass. After the second one, he became more talkative and less inhibited in expressing his thoughts and opinions.

I knew Maslyeyev quite well. As a student, he was not as young as the others; he was probably already thirty-two or thirty-three years old. He was a very serious person and studied very diligently. He was a member of the Communist Party and when he was at the Rabfak, the students elected him as chairman of the *Studcom*, a Students' committee; besides, he was a real coal miner. I also knew his other attribute—he was a wonderful family man. All these traits of his character demonstrated that he was a simple, ordinary man, and in addition, unspoiled. I never heard anything bad about him.

Suddenly, contrary to all my usual precautions, I decided to become more open with him and asked, "Do you know what happened in Snyezhnoye?"

"Yes, I know. Some of my student friends wrote to me about it. But this is all rubbish, Orest Mikhailovich," he commented.

"It is very easy for you to say 'rubbish', Comrade Maslyeyev!" I exclaimed and specified, "But, as you can see, I have a family! And outside is snow and frost!"

"But, for now, nobody has touched you?" he asked.

"But who can guaran-tee they will not touch me soon?" I asked him in reply. "Do I have to sit here and wait until they do? Here you came, knocked on my door, and my heart missed a beat or two."

"I can understand you," he said and after a short meditation asked me, "How are you settled here? How are they treating you here?"

"The same as they treated me in Snyezhnoye when you were there as a chairman of the *Studcom*; all students are very happy with me. But don't I know how quickly the students' mood could be changed."

"Yes, I understand. You see... Students know that you are a good teacher and they respect you with their hearts. But, you see... our party has all kinds of people. Like, for example in Snyezhnoye, Comrade Perekotiyenko. You know he had a grudge against you when I was there. But we all, the director, the *Profcom* secretary, and I, were restraining him! But he was a teacher of the Marxist-Leninist Theory and of the History of the Communist Party! With him we all had to be very careful because we were afraid that in the *Raypartcom*<sup>8</sup> they would believe him more than any of us. He was their man! And who were we? We were the masses, though we also understood something... but, our opinion doesn't count." Maslyeyev sat for a while silently and then added, "You know, Perekotiyenko was such an evil man that he would not have mercy on his own brother!"

"Why did he hate me so much?" I asked him, as I did not know the answer.

"Well, you stood in his way. I mean, you being an assistant director. And he fancied even in his dreams to be in your place! Obviously, he finally had somehow dug up the information about you. And the students... well, they probably had to do it on his instructions... you know, the low-ranking party members are trained to always follow without questioning the instructions that come from somebody on the top of the party organization."

I was glad to hear his opinion, but did not want to bring the conversation to the point of discussing my past any further and told him, "I did not imagine that man's vanity could blind him so much that he couldn't see his own merit! It is disgusting to even talk about the means he used in trying to get there! But think that it was all for nothing, because they didn't hire him in my place!" I closed our discussion with my last comment because it was becoming too dangerous for me to be asked by Maslyeyev about my past. I switched the subject to find out the news about my student, "It is better that you tell me about yourself. How successful are you in your studies over there?"

Maslyeyev emitted a long deep sigh like expressing a sorrow about something and then stated, "What kind of successes in my studies, Orest Mikhailovich? If I have to tell you what we were doing in the Institute, you would not believe me! This year we have not started studying anything yet!"

"What do you mean? The whole first semester has already gone!"

"Yes, it's gone, but we didn't start the courses we were supposed to study," he answered bitterly.

"What did you do all this time?" I asked him with curiosity.

"We were studying military science and contemporary politics!" he announced solemnly and ironically. In his expression was more irony than solemnity and he was not hiding it, probably because he was not afraid of me after our sincere conversation, and probably because several glasses of vodka removed his inhibition; the bitter truth was asking to come out to be shared with somebody without fear.

"We were learning how to conduct the collectivization!" he exclaimed. "And after that we did engage in practical work. And how we did practice, Orest Mykhaylovich! To tell you the truth, our share was only the remnants after the trained people had done their work. Even that was terrible..." He paused for a while, like reviewing before his eyes the scenes about which he was about to tell me, and was collecting his thoughts.

Then he continued uninhibited, like he was pouring out what he had kept imprisoned in his mind until now, "We were traveling from village to village in Dnyepropetrovsk Agricultural Region, one of the richest regions in the Ukraine! Great extensions of fields! And even under the thick cover of snow, one felt like traveling over the fertile land. But we were not traveling on the roads; there were no roads; everything was covered with snow and huge snowdrifts. In the villages too, there were no cleared roads. In some places the snowdrifts covered the cottage roofs... there were no fresh sled marks or human footprints, only those of wild animals and birds... desolation was everywhere, like the whole population had died out..."

Maslyeyev was talking like in a trance, staring at the white wall and pausing between phrases and incomplete sentences. I was not interrupting him as he continued with his story, "It was a ghastly feeling... even I felt scared. And I have seen all kinds of horrors in the mines!.. I have seen people crushed, buried alive, suffocated, and torn to

pieces... I myself have been covered up with earth and coal several times... but over there I felt terrified.

"We drove and drove without seeing one live soul... around us deadly still silence... and untouched snow, the first sled marks were ours. We would drive into a village and see cottage doors and windows open. In some places the wind had already scattered the straw from the thatched roofs, all signs that nobody was there. Everything was empty and silent, one couldn't hear the barking of dogs, or mooing of cows, no bleat of sheep, no human voice. We stopped in one vil-lage and from curiosity entered some of the cottages with the open doors. We found the huddled up frozen bodies of children, women, and old people... there were only a few old men, those younger ones were all deported.

"Our political instructor explained to us, 'They were all *kulaks*' families, and everything was expropriated from them. In the spring the government will organize many *kolkhoz* units in these places by settling the landless poor peasants from the other regions. Because the collectivization had to be done at any cost.'

"It is the truth, Orest Mikhailovich, the reality of today's life! One should see it with own eyes to believe it! It's terrifying! At night I cannot sleep now; I have nightmares..."

For a long time Maslyeyev recounted me his terrible and true story; listening to it gave me the shivers. I was sitting there crushed by the seemingly almost incoherent story of my former student, member of the Communist Party, who had indulged in such confidence in his semi-inebriated state. I did not offer him more vodka as he had a long way home and needed to sober up.

"You are asking how I am doing in the Institute of Mining Science," he told me bitterly. "Even the military science they taught us was useless! As you can see, they sent us to make war against the dead! Thank God, two weeks of vacation are ahead. I will rest a little and maybe will be able to forget..." He did not finish the sentence and added, "They told us that in the second semester we will start the real studies."

Suddenly Maslyeyev looked at his watch, got up from his chair, and said, "I better hurry up, I have to walk now very fast to reach my home before it gets dark." And in saluting me he suggested, "And you, Orest Mikhailovich, don't wait too long. As soon as you can find a position far away from here, don't let it slip from you—move away from here. You are right, anything could happen at any time... it is foolish to sit here and wait until it happens!"

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Na kanikulakh" [in Russian], MS, TS, 1955. Selected excerpts, [additions as recounted by the author], trans. and ed. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Also previously published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (R. Mychnevich, pseud.), "Na kanikulakh" [in Russian], journal. *Zhar Ptyza*, (San Francisco, February-March, 1956.) 20-23. Private collection, of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "Hamlet of Kiselyevka."

3. See the chapter "The Extraordinary Meeting."

4. Party organizer.

5. *profcom* – acronym for Professional Committee Of the Teachers' Professional Union.

6. Rabochy *cooperative* - Workers' Cooperative, a misnomer, because it was, like everything else in the Soviet Union, owned by the state.

7. See the chapter "Digging Into My Father's Past."

8. *Raypartcom* – acronym for *Rayonny Partiyiny Komitet* - The Regional Party Committee.

# Knopsyk

By Olga Gladky Verro

Additions by Orest M. Gladky and Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

When my mother and I returned to the hamlet of Kisyelyevka from our summer vacation at Kurort Slavyansk,<sup>1</sup> my father had a surprise for me. It was a small female dog, black with large white spots. Her name was Knopka—in Russian it means a “press-button,”—because she had a round, shiny, black nose on the point of a white muzzle. Someone who was moving from the hamlet, had asked my father if he wanted to take her. My father liked her right away and made a place for her to sleep on the floor of a small “to-be-built-later-toilet” room in our new apartment.

Knopka was a very gentle and good-natured pet and we all enjoyed having her. But very soon we discovered that Knopka’s belly was becoming larger and larger and one day when my mother and I returned from school we found her in labor. My mother assisted with words of encouragement as Knopka presented us with a gift of three squeaking puppies. She busied herself licking them and, after cleaning herself, offered them her nipples, to which the puppies attached themselves immediately.

But Knopka was not able to raise her litter because she became ill; probably, it was an internal infection. She didn’t want to eat anything and was only drinking water or milk. We had to bottle-feed the puppies to keep them from crying and dying. One morning Knopka asked to be let outside as usual and didn’t return. We were able to place two puppies with somebody in the hamlet, and the third one, who was an exact copy of Knopka, we kept for ourselves. We decided to name him after his mother, changing the name to the masculine, Knops. Because he was so little we called him with the diminutive name, Knopsyk.

Knopsyk had a black, smooth, shiny coat and a fluffy tail which curled up like a bagel, a white necktie descended on his chest and he could almost talk with his intelligent black eyes. We all loved him very much and he paid us back with his canine love and devotion. He knew us perfectly and understood our every word, but he could understand us also without words. He guessed with his canine senses our moods and tried to stay in the shadow when we needed to be left alone. Very often in difficult moments of our life, he made us forget the reality by entertaining us with his unusually bright personality and quick-wittedness.

As Knopsyk was growing up, my father and I taught him all kinds of tricks, jumping, sitting still, lying down, and playing hide and seek with me. What fun we had when we taught him to find me, and Knopsyk would run all around the apartment looking for me. He learned quickly all the hiding places and it took him only a few seconds to find me and then to run to my father and wait for a piece of candy as a reward. Well, one evening my father decided to hide me on their bed under the blanket. Knops ran to look in all places that he knew and then stopped near the bed, not sure what to do because he knew he was not allowed there. He started to bark and run back and forth looking up and finally decided to jump on the bed and to pull the blanket with

his paws and teeth until he uncovered me. My father and I had such fun, but my mother was not amused to have to make the bed all over again.

That winter Knopsyk became a member of our family. I was responsible for keeping him clean and free from fleas. To do this I was giving him a bath once a week in the small basin in the kitchen, combing out the fleas and, after drying him with his towel, keeping him in front of the open, warm oven until he was completely dry. My mother was in charge of feeding him and my father indulged him with candies, although only as a reward for learning or repeating tricks.

Knopsyk was very alert and he was able to recognize not only our steps but also of those few visitors who came to our apartment. He was able to detect when one of us was just starting on the ground floor to climb up the three flights of stairs. He showed it by becoming all excited as he waited impatiently near the door, jumping and wagging his tail. Watching him, we knew that papa, or mama, or I was coming up, or even one of father's friends.

But we never could figure out how he could recognize the steps of one of my father's students, whom I knew only by her first name, Maria. Every time, she was climbing the stairs, Knopsyk would start to bark angrily and jump at the door. We had to close him in his place, because he would not stop barking until she was gone. And all the time she was in our apartment he was growling behind the closed door. "That dog is never so upset by anybody else," concluded my mother and warned my father, "This woman is coming with evil intentions and Knopsyk is detecting it with his animal instinct."

I remember my father and mother discussing what they knew about Maria whose last name, as I found out, was Morozova. They knew that she was of humble peasant origins and that she came to work on the mine, where a young woman of her stout build was able to do any work that a man could do. Here she became an active member of the Bolshevik Party and enrolled at the Rabfak, hoping that education would help her to advance her career and status in the party. As my father found out, at the Rabfak she was promoted year after year only because of her party membership and not for honestly earned grades.

This tactic didn't work with my father, who expected his students to learn and to receive their grades according to their achievements. She just couldn't learn and make her home assignments in chemistry for lack of a basic educational background. But most detestable was that she actually expected my father to do all the work and let her copy it. He told her several times that she should come for help during the tutoring hours at the Rabfak, but she continued to ignore it and was coming to our apartment, rather than seeking his help with the other students present in the classroom. Of course, this made my father very nervous and angry, especially when she adopted a more aggressive approach by making hints that she had comrades at the Rabfak in the nearby hamlet of Snyezhnoye and that she heard from them about some strange meeting that happened there regarding a former member of the White Army. It was a pure and simple tactic of scaring him with blackmail.

After this revelation my mother argued with my father, telling him to stop being stubborn by clinging to his principle of giving the students only the grades they deserved. "You know very well that all teachers give her passing grades because she is a party member. Why do you want to ask for trouble?" she insisted. I think that at the

end my father gave her a passing grade just to keep peace in our family. No wonder that Knopsyk barked so much at Maria. He indeed felt that she had bad intentions in her mind when she came to see my father.

I remember<sup>2</sup> one late afternoon in the spring, close to the final exams, Knops suddenly, for no reason at all, got furious, began to bark angrily, scratching the door, growling, jumping to the door handle, jumping back from the door only to jump back to it with such loud barking that we had to cover our ears. We all rushed to calm him down using all means including admonishment, but to no avail, nothing worked. Instead in a few minutes his barking increased in intensity and my father had to take him in his arms and squeeze his muzzle with his hand because someone was knocking on the door. My mother opened the door. There stood Maria Morozova...

Maria Morozova! Now it became clear to us why our Knops was enraged. We knew that he couldn't be mistaken. Of course, we invited her to sit down on our improvised couch, waiting with anxiety to hear what she had to say.

"Why are you keeping this little angry dog? I would have shot him long ago with my own hands! You know, when I was working for the Rostov-on-Don CheKa<sup>3</sup>, once I had shot a similar dog, together with his owner, a White officer. It was probably in the year 1920-21... Oh, how many White officers we executed at that time!" she announced, carried away with immense satisfaction.

Knops was sitting on my father's lap with the squeezed muzzle and struggling to break loose and jump on comrade Morozova, but since he couldn't, he was only whining and angrily glared at her.

Comrade Morozova! Oh, we still remember her: short and stout woman of about thirty-and-something, with gray discolored face and burning eyes. She represented a mixture of unusual hatred, boundless envy and infinite evil, deeply hidden behind her foxy smile. However, it was hard to explain how her pudgy short hands could in cold blood shoot the White officers, bourgeois and even innocent little dogs. How those hands sneaked up to the innocent throats or without trembling squeezed the trigger. And now, reminding us about those "innocent" accomplishments behind the walls of CheKa, she was preparing the ground toward influencing her grade on the final exam in chemistry. She knew very well that in regard to grades my father didn't take in consideration anyone or anything, giving "satisfactory" and "unsatisfactory" grades even to those belonging to "party-very-high-located" comrade-students.

"The exams will be soon?" almost casually she asked.

"Yes," replied my father, "And after—a long awaited vacation."

"And what topic you will give me?" She finally asked him a direct question.

"Why do you need to know the topic? You shouldn't be afraid—you have all 'satisfactory' grades in chemistry during the year. Is it possible for you to think that you may receive 'unsatisfactory' on the exams?"

"You know, I would have liked to receive higher than 'satisfactory'..."

"Regrettably, I couldn't tell you the topic because I don't know which one would come to you as they are distributed by chance."

"But this could be arranged." She hinted at some kind of dishonest arrangement.

"No, this I cannot arrange, comrade Morozova!"

All students knew my father's strictness and impartiality in regard to the grades and also knew that he couldn't be "merciful" to anyone under any circumstances.

Morozova also new this. But she, probably, hoped that her visit will scare him. However, she, obviously, decided that it was not enough to change his mind because she suddenly returned to her initial subject about the killings of the Rostov-on-Don CheKa and concluded her visit with the words:

“Well, you better kill your angry little dog!”

Of course, we couldn’t even think about doing such a thing to our dear Knopsyk! But he himself was putting his life in danger every time he was performing his duty in guarding my mother.

Knopsyk loved to accompany my mother to the market and to the miners’ cooperative. He would run a few steps ahead of her, making sure with his ringing yelping that the road was clear for her; then, happy to be of service to her, he would stop and wiggle his tail and wait for her. Then he would repeat it over and over again all the way to the place where she was going, and back home. He was doing this very zealously as if he felt that he alone was responsible for my mother’s safety. He did this task for the whole winter. By the time spring came he was not a puppy anymore but he didn’t lose any enthusiasm for his canine duty of protecting my mother on the street.

The macadam road, which my mother had to cross right in front of our apartment building, was a straight road with a clear view in both directions. It was not a busy road—it was traveled mostly by carts pulled by horses. Only occasionally would an automobile belonging to the coal mine be seen on it.

One morning in the spring when I was on my way to school, my mother got ready to go to the miners’ cooperative and my father was getting ready to go to Rabfak. As always, Knopsyk was excited to go out to accompany my mother. She walked out of the front door of our apartment building and just got to the curb of the road and stopped before crossing it, because she saw a small black automobile that was arriving very slowly on the other side of the road. Knopsyk, as usual rushed with loud barking at this intruder and, because it was not stopping, he jumped over to bite the front tire and instantly was thrown in the air by the rotating wheel and landed in the middle of the road. It all happened so quickly that my mother was able only to scream a warning, “Knopsyk!” when he was already lying unconscious on the ground. My mother called him, “Knopsyk, Knopsyk!” And touched his immobile body, which did not respond to her voice or touch. She assumed he was dead. The automobile didn’t even stop to see what happened.

My mother ran back three flights of stairs to our apartment to call my father, who was getting dressed. In a hurry he put his shoes on, while my mother described to him how the accident happened. Since my mother was sure that Knopsyk was dead, they didn’t rush downstairs. When they opened the door, to their surprise the wounded and barely breathing Knopsyk lay on the doormat to our apartment.

My father gently inspected the poor dog’s body and as he tried to move him, Knopsyk emitted painful cries. Father decided not to lift the fatally wounded dog and instead pulled the whole doormat in the apartment and left it in the hall near the door. Only then did he see the thin stream of blood dripping from the dog’s mouth.

“He is wounded internally,” he said to my mother. Knopsyk was lying immobile emitting faint whines and barely breathing. “I have to go and call on one of my students who has a gun,” said my father.

“Oh, no!” exclaimed my mother, “Are you sure that nothing can be done to save him? You know Lyalya will be very heartbroken!”

"The best thing we can do now is stop the poor dog's suffering. We shall think later how to explain this to our daughter," concluded my father with determination. "You better go to the Rabfak and tell them that I will come as soon as I put this dog out of his misery."

When I returned home from school, I found it very strange that Knopsyk was not home. "Where is Knopsyk?" I asked my mother.

Reluctantly she told me about the accident. "He was clearing the road for me," she said. "And he had the instinct to climb all the way up the stairs to come home."

"What happened then?" I insisted. "Where is he now?"

"Papa had to call his student to kill him."

"Why did he have to kill him?" I screamed and burst into tears.

I cried the whole afternoon lying on my bed. When my father returned home, he came to console me and to explain that Knopsyk would have died anyway after maybe several days of suffering, and that it was not right to prolong his ordeal. But I didn't want to even look at my father and to hear what he was saying. I just screamed at him, "Go way! Go away! You killed him! Go away!" I was so upset with my father for what he had done that I didn't talk to him for several days.

Until this incident happened, my father was for me a great authority. I always looked up to him and thought he knew everything and did everything right. This was the first time I definitely disagreed with his decision and his action and could not forgive him for a long time for killing my dear Knopsyk. I think that this was my first disappointment with my father and my first awareness that he could sometimes be wrong and not always right. From that day on, my blind trust in my father changed to a more cautious believing in his opinions, and I began to evaluate the rightfulness of some of his beliefs and actions.

But all three of us grieved for a long time for our dear little Knopsyk and he remains forever in our memory.

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1. See the chapter "The Extraordinary Meeting."

2. Orest M Gladky, (O. Mikhailov, pseudonym), *Knops*, [in Russian], newsp. Rossiya, No. 8014, May 9, 1969, pgs. 3, 7, (Rossiya Publishing, New York), selected excerpts. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

3. CheKa – acronym for *Chresvychaynaya Kommissiya* – Extraordinary Commission that acted as a secret police against counterrevolutionaries from 1917-1921 in the Soviet Union.

## Kotyk And Volodya Are Growing Up

By Olga Gladky Verro

As Recounted by Nikolay Nikolayevich Berezhnoy, Vladymyr Nikolayevich Berezhnoy,  
And Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

After the civil war was over Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy<sup>2</sup> worked as an architect at the Slavyansk Town's Soviet in the town's communal property office. His work included maintenance of the town's buildings and rental housing of the properties that were seized from the owners by the government. He felt that it was time for him to move to real construction work. He applied and was hired by the Department of Industrial Development of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as a building engineer to work on the construction projects of the state's industrial sites.

It was at the beginning of the industrialization period going on in the whole Soviet Union, and people and resources were mobilized like in wartime for this enormous enterprise. For this kind of work Nikolay Gavriylovich was well paid, but on the other hand there were some inconveniences that he had to accept. Once a project was finished on one site, he was transferred to a new place where a new factory had to be constructed. It involved constantly moving the family from one town to another, not allowing them to put down roots in any one place.

The first appointment of Nikolay Gavriylovich was in the town of Taganrog during the period of NEP.<sup>3</sup> At that period life was somewhat easier since food was back on the market and the Soviet authorities did not persecute the small entrepreneurs.

When Nikolay Gavriylovich arrived in Taganrog, as a building engineer he was treated better than the simple workers who usually lived with their families in quickly built wooden barracks. Instead, he received a single house where his family could live comfortably. His work was challenging and proceeded for a while very well without any problems. He began to have a brighter outlook on the stability of his position in the Department of the Industrial Development of Ukrainian S.S.R.<sup>4</sup> But Nikolay always had on his mind that he had previously worked in that town with a well-known architectural company and was fearful to encounter someone who knew him before. In those days nobody was sure about what could happen to him tomorrow even if one was politically clean as a whistle.

Therefore, for him what happened one night in Taganrog was not completely unexpected. But for his wife and young sons it was a frightening episode that they never forgot it. Indeed, it impressed the boys so much they remembered what happened that night very well with all the details.

At about two o'clock in the morning several men dressed in GPU uniforms with an officer in charge had burst into their home and started to search everywhere, throw-ing everything on the floor. Somehow, without being seen by them, Katya was able to throw a small bundle with her gold jewelry out the window and save it from being seized. Nikolay Gavriylovich was arrested and was taken away by the GPU agents.

There was a public trial; his wife Katya and both sons came to the court to hear it. The prosecutor accused Nikolay Gavriylovich of negligence on the job. For some reason, as he was working on the additions to the buildings of the glass factory, he was considered to be responsible for a collision of two freight cars full of glass that was all broken into small pieces. The trial was very short and only a few witnesses were produced. They testified that he was guilty of some kind of undefined negligence and Nikolay Gavriylovich was not even allowed to defend himself. Then the judge pronounced the verdict, "Guilty." And after that he pronounced the sentence, "Two years in prison."

His wife Katya and especially his sons Kotyk and Volodya were terrified watching as the guards in GPU uniforms escorted their father as a hard core criminal to the prison with their weapons pointed at him and ready to be used in case he dared to run from them on the street.

A strange thing happened, though; Nikolay Gavriylovich was kept in the town prison instead of being transferred to another center of detention as was customary for other prisoners after a trial. While serving his term in prison, he was assigned to the project of rebuilding the portions of the town prison right away. It was very suspicious, because it required just the time to finish it in those two years. Later, it resulted that he was not guilty of what he was accused of, and one could only presume that he was framed by the GPU and his whole trial was staged, because they needed a free building engineer to work on their prison additions—and they found the easy way to get one.

However, for his wife Katya it was a very difficult time when she had to provide for herself and her two sons. When she was faced with this problem, she remembered that when she was young and helped in her father's inn they prepared meals for a large number of people—there was always enough food left for the whole family to eat. She thought, "If I cook for several people, there would be enough food left for my two sons and me to eat". She decided to put her know-how and previous experience of cooking for a large number of people into practice.

She knew well several colleagues of her husband, technicians and engineers, who didn't have their families with them. She remembered that some of them had expressed their envy to her husband for being so lucky to have his wife with him—she prepared home cooked meals, while they had to swallow that foul food in the factory cafeteria day after day. Well, right away she found the customers. When she offered to cook for them two meals a day, they all welcomed her invitation, since well prepared home meals were definitely preferable to the sloppy factory cafeteria food and, in addition, she charged them less than it would cost them there. Of course, it helped her that at that time the NEP policy was allowing the small entrepreneurs and the peasants to sell their products freely and the food was available on the market.

Very early on Saturday mornings Katya went to the market with her two sons and bought all the necessary provisions for the whole week, loading it all on a wagon to be delivered to their home. That's how for two years Katya was able to provide food not only for herself and her children but was able also to bring home-made food regularly to her husband in prison.

Although Katya was always religious, her sons observed that after the arrest of their father she became even more devoted to her prayers than before. She had a couple of icons, which she kept in a corner of the room. There she would light two candles and quietly whisper her prayers without bothering her sons. She did not impose on them, neither to pray, nor to learn the prayers, and she did not cultivate in them the religious teachings. In those days when antireligious propaganda by the Bolsheviks was in full bloom, children were not brought up with the religious spirit forced on them. It was a hope of many parents that their children would grow up respecting the religion just by observing their parents' devotion to God and by maintaining the religious traditions in the family.

It was at this time that Katya received from her aunt Varya the news about her own father. Katya's father, Iosif Iosifovich Grechko, after fleeing from his hometown of

Slavyansk, was hiding for the rest of his life from the CheKa and GPU because, as the previous owner of several inns in town, he was on the list of the “enemies of the people.” The local authorities never ceased to search and try to arrest him as a former rich *bourjoug*<sup>5</sup>, who in the eyes of the Bolsheviks was considered forever to be the enemy of the revolution and the Soviet government.

After several years being of incommunicado, her father found a way to let his daughter know where he was hiding. He lived somewhere in the small village of the Caucasus region. When Katya found out the address of her father, she went to visit him and show him his two grandsons. It was from her father that Katya found out that her only brother, who was in the White Army, was able to embark at the last moment on a ship and now was living abroad, either in Belgium or France.

Katya’s son Volodya remembered that his maternal grandfather, whom he had never seen before, was a large man of very pleasing manners and that he received them with a warm welcome. When it was time to return, he gave them a lot of grapes and watermelons, which they had to carry to the railroad station, load on the train, and then haul them all the way from the station to their home. But the effort was not lost; they had a supply to last for a long time.

When Nikolay Gavriylovich was released from the Taganrog prison, he was transferred to the city of Kharkov to work on the construction of a very large industrial complex, and the whole family moved there. They lived there for several years in an apartment building like most people in that large city. While they were living in Kharkov, his sister Nyusya was attending Kharkovsky Medical Institute and stayed with his family for a short time.

Although both Kotyk and Volodya had started elementary school in Taganrog, they had to change to the new school in Kharkov. Like all children in that school district they had to attend the so-called Thirty-Seventh Factory-and-Workshop School that provided seven years of general education and some vocational training. When they started the school, they were registered by the names of Nikolay and Vladimir, and from then on they were called by those names; only their family and relatives continued to call them by their nicknames of Kotyk and Volodya.

After graduation from the Seven-Year School, Kotyk, under the guidance of his father, enrolled in one of Kharkov’s technical schools, but he couldn’t continue to study there because his family had moved again and this time to the town of Maryupol. Nikolay Gavriylovich was transferred there as a building engineer to a large center of metallurgical works called Azovstal<sup>6</sup>, where he worked on the construction of the new metallurgical plants that were built at full speed as a part of the planned industrialization of the country. In Maryupol, Volodya continued to attend the elementary school and Kotyk had to transfer to the similar technical school like the one he attended in Kharkov. Kotyk graduated with specialization as a lathe operator and in that capacity he began his working career in one of the Azovstal plants.

It was in Maryupol that Katya’s father came to visit them. Kotyk and Volodya were impressed with the way their grandfather sat at the table with an air of great importance, as if he wished to commemorate that occasion solemnly. He said to his daughter, “Well, Katya, pour me a drink!” She poured him in a tall glass 200 grams of vodka, which he drank all in one breath.

Then he took a bite of a small hot red pepper that she placed in front of him,

knowing that he liked to have it as a snack after vodka. The grandsons were surprised with their grandfather's strange taste. This was his only visit to his daughter and they have not seen him since then.

Instead, Nikolay Gavriylovich and Katya always maintained contact with his father, Gavriyl Daniylovich, and with Katya's Aunt Varya and Uncle Misha. With their sons Kotyk and Volodya, they often returned to visit them in Slavyansk.

Since Nikolay Gavriylovich was a very good building engineer, many party members were pressuring him to become a member of the Communist-Bolshevik party. Nikolay stubbornly resisted their persuasions by justifying himself with an important apology that his work was taking all his time and that he couldn't attend all meetings that were required of party members.

Volodya remembered one episode—clearly as if it just happened yesterday—when his father disregarded all the precautions of not taking risks in expressing his anti-communist feelings in the presence of his sons. That evening his father came home from work irritated and upset. He explained to Katya, "That damn secretary of the Bolshevik Party cell of our department worked on me all day again, trying to persuade me to become a member of the Communist Party. This time he was so insistent that I ran out of excuses for my negative answers." Then he raised his voice, "Can you imagine, he was so impudent to tell me looking straight in my eyes that I could never have any promotions on the job unless I join the party!" And in an outburst of anger his father shouted, "Let them kill me, but I will never become a Bolshevik!"

Indeed, by not becoming a Communist Party member, Nikolay was never promoted to any top positions in his field and, as soon as the construction work in one place was completed, he was sent to another town. And it happened again—he was transferred from Maryupol to work for a short time in Artyemovsk. There his first disappointment happened with his older son Kotyk.

Nikolay Gavriylovich expected his sons to follow his footsteps and to select some technical field for their careers. From the time Kotyk and Volodya were young he was cultivating in them the aptitudes and skills needed in technical education. When they were older, he used to place in one of the rooms two drafting tables and patiently teach them technical drafting and, when they became more skillful, he encouraged them by paying them for copying his architectural drawings. He influenced even his younger brother Petya to study in the architectural technical school. But he failed to convince his older son to study further in the technical field.

From his childhood Kotyk was keen on all kinds of sports; he liked the light athletics, skiing, and he loved all kinds of sports games, especially the game called gumball. In Artyemovsk Kotyk met several young men who studied physical culture in the local technical school. They invited him to their gymnastics and athletic events and sports games.

As a result of his fascination with sports he decided against the advice of his father, to discontinue his studies in the technical field. He changed the direction of his career by enrolling in 1932 in the Artyemovsky Technicum of Physical Culture.<sup>7</sup> There he studied only one year. During that first year he demonstrated his excellent abilities in sports and earned good grades in other subjects. To his surprise, he received an offer of transfer to the Kharkov's Institute of Physical Culture of Ukraine. Of course, this was an unexpected opportunity, which he could not miss, and in the next school year he

started the first course with the major in physical education. It was an enormous blow to his father's ambition for his eldest son and he was very upset with his son's choice.

From the short project in Artyemovsk Nikolay Gavriylovich was transferred to work in the town of Kherson and the family moved again to a new place to live. Volodya attended school there and graduated in 1937 from a Ten-Year High School, which qualified him to enroll in any university or college. To the dismay of his father, Volodya followed in the footsteps of his older brother and after graduation he went to Kharkov and also enrolled in the Kharkov's Institute of Physical Culture of Ukraine.

Nikolay Gavriylovich was terribly upset after both of his sons selected to specialize in the physical education field, which he didn't consider a serious career. In the heat of the argument that happened when Volodya and his older brother Kotyk came on vacation from Kharkov, he asked them both with a touch of sarcasm in his voice, "What kind of a career is this 'physical culture'? Both of you have selected to become clowns! Yes, real clowns!"

Kotyky and Volodya could not convince their father that they liked physical activities and had very good skills in sports and gymnastics. They told him that at that time the Soviet government was placing a great emphasis on competitive sports and on physical education in schools, colleges, and youth camps; therefore, there were plenty of career opportunities in those fields. They couldn't understand their father's objections and arguments against their career choice. The verbal strife between father and sons was unpleasant and regrettable and it left a bitter feeling in the family; at the end, both sides remained convinced that they were right. Therefore, both Kotyk and Volodya pursued their education in their chosen field and their father continued to detest their choice.

Disappointment in his sons aggravated Nikolay's drinking problem, which began after Katya discovered that he had an affair with a young woman with whom he worked. When Katya was in Slavyansk, she confided with her sister-in-law Tonya about it. She recounted in minute detail how she confronted on the sidewalk that "no-good wench," how she pushed and pushed her until that "bitch" bumped her back against the electric pole, and how she then grabbed her by the hair and banged her head against the wood. After this incident Katya and Nikolay had a big quarrel and he swore to her that no such thing would ever happen again.

However, Katya complained that after this happened, Nikolay began to drink more than usual, but she hoped that with time he would get back to normal. However, after the confrontation with his sons about their choice of careers, Nikolay began to drink heavily. At the first opportunity Katya confronted and accused her sons by telling them straightforward, "Boys, it is all your fault and you are responsible that your father started to drink heavily. It's you who made him become a drunkard!" But Kotyk and Volodya could never believe that it was their fault.

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1. Nikolay (Kotyky) Nikolayevich Berezhnoy and Vladymyr (Volodya) Nikolayevich Berezhnoy [also spelled Wladimir Bereschnoy in Canada], memoirs, audiocassette, telephone, (Toronto, ONT, September, 1993). Also as recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, 1993.

2. See the chapter "Family of Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy."

3. NEP – acronym for *Novaya Ekonomicheskaya Politika* - The New Economic Policy.

4. Soviet Socialist Republic.

5. Russian pronunciation of the word bourgeois. A member of the bourgeoisie in Marxist doctrine

was considered a capitalist, or a member of the anti-proletarian social class.

6. Azov - the Sea of Azov; and *stal* - steel.

7. Artyemovsk's Technical School of Physical Education.

## Return To My Hometown Of Slavyansk

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In the summer of 1934 during the school vacations my daughter Lyalya and I, as usual, came to my hometown of Slavyansk. There, at the well-known health resort Slavyansk Kurort, every summer she was receiving applications with the hot salty mud from the Salty Lake, a therapy for her facial paralysis. I was taking relaxing baths with the warm salty water from the lake, and both of us were resting in the afternoons in the pine forest on the hammock hung between the trunks of the old pine trees.

The improvement on Lyalya's face was proceeding very slowly. But the neurologist from Kharkov that was coming to the clinic at the Kurort advised us that she needed this therapy to keep the affected muscles and nerves on the left side of her face relaxed and to keep her mouth in the normal shape. The doctor was also giving us hope that the therapy could be beneficial to improve her smile and especially laughing, which hadn't yet become symmetrical on both sides. He told us that the left eyebrow would remain immobile where the nerve remained paralyzed. But so far, the rest of her facial nerves and muscles on the left side were functional and we hoped that they would slowly but steadily improve.

My husband remained in the hamlet of Kisyelyevka where, after a short rest, he as the Rabfak's assistant director for the curriculum had to work with the secretary on the schedules for students and teachers for the 1934-35 school year. The situation of my husband during the second year of employment at the Rabfak

had become worrisome. Too many Bolshevik Party members had contacts with the party members from the neighboring hamlet of Snyezhnoye.<sup>1</sup> They were becoming too curious about what happened to him when he worked there at the Rabfak and were not too subtle in asking some leading questions about his past.

It was a very tense year and, from being nervous and being on the alert all the time, my husband had developed strong stomach pains. When he came home, he had to lie down with the heating bottle on his stomach to calm the pain. He also had to maintain a very bland diet and, to lower the stomach acid, to take bicarbonate of soda. It was also becoming taxing on me and even on our daughter.

My husband finally came to the usual conclusion, "It's time to go!" And we decided to move farther from the coal mining hamlets. We thought that the town of

Slavyansk was as good as any other place to try if there were some opportunities for employment there. We reasoned that, because of a shortage of teachers in the country, one always could find teaching positions.

I went to the Slavyansk's Commissariat of People's Education, commonly called *Narobras*,<sup>2</sup> to inquire about a position for me in the 1934-35 school year. Indeed, there was an opening for a teacher of Russian language in the Ukrainian Pedagogical Technical School—commonly called Teachers Technicum—that prepared elementary school teachers for the Ukrainian schools.

From the time a dual system of schools was introduced in the country as a means of suppression of nationalistic discontent in the Soviet republics, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic had established two types of schools. One type was called Ukrainian schools, where all subjects were taught in Ukrainian and the study of the Russian language was required as an official language of the Soviet Union. The other type was called Russian schools, where all subjects were taught in Russian with the required study of the Ukrainian language as an official language of the Ukrainian Republic. Therefore, after the introduction of the so-called Ukrainization of education, many elementary school teachers who knew both languages and could teach in Ukrainian were needed. So I had no difficulty in finding employment.

I was appointed for the 1934-35 school year to teach the required Russian language at the Ukrainian Teachers Technicum. It was located up the hill beyond the cemetery on the Kharkovsky Street, which was now renamed Shevchenko<sup>3</sup> Street.

Not far from the Teachers Technicum, on Shevchenko Street, was a large property expropriated by the Soviets after the revolution from one rich family. Now housed there were Technicum's students and teachers. The Technicum students' dormitory was a long, white one-story building, probably a former inn, with a large courtyard in the back of it. Next to the dormitory building was a big old brick house that was subdivided into many one and two-room apartments for the teachers. A tall wooden fence surrounded both buildings, the courtyard and the garden. Next to the dormitory there was a gate leading to the courtyard and to the entrances to both buildings. Far in the back of each of the buildings were two separate wooden outhouses.

On the back part of the teachers' apartment building, almost the whole length of it, was a large enclosed porch with big windows and an entrance door leading to all the apartments, except one at the end of it that had a separate entrance with high brick steps.

This separate apartment was assigned to me. I liked it right away because it had privacy and enough space. Upon entering the apartment there was a kitchen with a brick stove built into the wall dividing it from the very large room and providing heat in the winter. In the back of the apartment house was a large fruit garden with old, tall apple and pear trees and a nice yard for my daughter to play.

As soon as I received the apartment, I sent a telegram to my husband, "I am employed. Received the apartment. Ship by rail everything to Slavyansk." I was hoping that once he was here it would be as easy for him to find a teaching position as it had been for me. After all, we already had a place to live and my salary was sufficient to start in the new place. To our surprise, that year there were no openings for teachers of biology, chemistry, or science in the Teachers Technicum or in any of the other schools in town; Orest remained unemployed the entire school year.

Having so much free time, he studied intensively for the correspondence courses of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute, in which both of us had been enrolled for three years. During the school vacation in the summer of 1935 we had to take our final examinations before graduation.

He also dedicated himself to his hobby of photography that he began in Snyezhnoye. He divided with black drapes one corner in the kitchen, which had no windows, and made a dark room for developing negatives and for printing pictures. In the large room he hung on the wall a black cloth as a background and in front of it placed a permanently standing tripod with the photographic camera with the exact focus to take pictures; on one side he placed a big reflector lamp for proper illumination. We never had so many photos taken as my husband did in that year.

He was also teaching Lyalya all the procedures of developing the hobby, because he constantly needed fresh chemicals such as glass negatives and printing photographs. It was an expensive developer and fixing agent, new glass negatives, various kinds of photographic papers for printing, and, of course, here and there some new gadget or equipment for enlargements. He didn't feel too concerned about spending money for this hobby, because he was not taking it from my salary but from the small amount of savings that we had accumulated when both of us worked. I felt that it was good learning for my daughter and didn't object to my husband's hobby. At that time we also got a small kitten that quickly grew up to be a nice blue gray cat, Murka, whom my husband trained to do some tricks.

However, my husband was helping me a lot in correcting the students' papers that I was bringing home every day from each class, because one of the major teaching tools in learning to write in Russian was dictation. The next day I used to go over the misspelled words and used those examples to teach the grammatical rules to my students.

Since the Teachers Technicum had a very large enrollment, the school day was divided in two shifts, and I had to work from eight o'clock in the morning to noon teaching four classes; then I had two hours to go home, cook the meal, and have lunch. Then I had to go back to work in the afternoon from two to six o'clock teaching the other four classes. Considering that there was an average of twenty-five students in each class, I had to correct two hundred students' dictation papers every day! I could ne-ver have done it by myself. Therefore, besides my husband, my daughter—who had already good experience correcting dictation papers of my Rabfak's students in Kisyelyevka—was also helping me with this task in the evening after finishing her assignments from school. Sometimes my youngest brother Petya also helped me with this task. We always stayed up late into the night correcting those papers that I needed for the next day.

And, as it was obvious, I needed a lot of help because besides teaching and correcting papers, I had to do many other chores. Early in the morning before going to work I had to run to the market in the center of town to buy fresh produce and milk. Orest couldn't adapt himself to do shopping in the market, although he went to buy bread and other foods in the cooperative and in the only delicatessen in town.

He also didn't feel comfortable and never tried to learn cooking meals and was only helping me. He cleaned the various grains by picking out stones, loose bran, and odd seeds. He also started the fire in the stove, and kept a pot ready with boiling water.

I had to cook either in the morning before going to work and leave him to watch it, or between the morning and afternoon shifts of teaching when I had only two hours to cook lunch and dinner and to eat.

In the teachers' apartment house the Technicum's assistant director of curriculum also lived. He was an inveterate Ukrainian nationalist who hated Russians, but he was very careful not to express his hatred openly, because the extreme Ukrainian nationalists were considered to be the enemies of the Bolsheviks. Therefore, he constantly reproached the teachers who spoke Russian in the teachers' room, always reminding them that this was the Ukrainian Technicum and they were expected to communicate in Ukrainian. But most of the teachers preferred to speak Russian because most of them were educated in that language and most of the intelligentsia spoke Russian at home and everywhere else, except in the classroom. And since I was teaching Russian I also spoke Russian with the other teachers in the teachers' room and they most likely answered in the same language. Of course, the assistant director didn't like this and from the start showed his contempt for me.

During that year I applied to the *Narobras* for accommodations in a *sanatorium*—a health resort facility—for my daughter and had received one month free room and board for her in the resort town of Yevpatoria in Crimea during the summer of 1935 school vacations. My husband accompanied her there.

At his return both of us had to depart to Moscow. It was our fourth and last year of studies at the correspondence courses. At the end of the summer session we had to take our final examinations and graduate from the Moscow Pedagogical Institute.

Before he returned from Crimea, we received from the institute instructions on what we had to present to the examination commission in order to be admitted to the final exams. They required that each student present their detailed autobiography, documents issued by the Town Soviet about the student's right to vote, and the documents from the last place of the residence of their parents stating the father's social status; the male students also had to present their military card.

Since my husband could not request any documents from Nikitovka because he was registered there as a *lishenyets*, he decided not to apply for the final exams. He reasoned that with the shortage of teachers his documents about the four years of the successful studies at the Moscow Pedagogical Institute would be almost equivalent to having a diploma and he could always say, "I shall finish my final exams next year." Therefore, I departed for Moscow alone.<sup>4</sup>

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1. See the chapters "Hamlet Kisyelyevka," "On Winter Vacation," and "The Extraordinary Meeting."

2. *Narobras* – acronym for *Kommissariat Narodnogo Obrasovaniya* - Commissariat of Popular Education.

3. Taras Shevchenko, the major Ukrainian poet.

4. See the chapter "The Keynote Speaker at the Teachers' Conference."

## My Preteen Years In Slavyansk

By Olga Gladky Verro

During the school summer vacation<sup>1</sup> in 1934 my mother and I went to Slavyansk Kurort,<sup>2</sup> as we did every summer. Before we left for our vacation I detected from my parents' conversations that they were worrying about my father's next school-year employment at the Rabfak in the hamlet of Kisyelyevka.<sup>3</sup> My mother had mentioned that she would try to find herself a teaching position in Slavyansk. She believed that since the Russian language was a required subject there could be some openings to teach it in the town, which had many schools. She told my father, "If I find employment for myself, you could look for a position later when you join us there."

I was not very surprised that my parents were planning to move again; I was becoming used to this nomadic way of life when we stayed in one place for short periods and moved from one location to another. My parents never told me the reason<sup>4</sup> for these sudden changes in their employment. However, in my child's mind I began vaguely to perceive that there was some kind of a secret that my parents kept zealously concealed from me. My mother often admonished my father for not being cautious with what he was saying in my presence—she was always afraid that I could inadvertently tell it to somebody.

From their discussions about the problems my father had at work and from the occasional comments about people who were causing them, I already understood that there were many malevolent people who were harassing my father. But most important, it was clear to me that all of them were Bolsheviks, members of the Communist Party, and officials of the Soviet government. By the time I was in the fourth grade I already detested these people. I loved my father and knew that he was a good and just person who was not capable of harming anybody. Therefore, I resented that these "damned Bolsheviks"—as my father called them in moments of exasperation—were making my father's life difficult, and my mother tense and nervous. I knew that to escape all this they were leaving their employment and moving to the new places.

At Slavyansk Kurort we rented a room from a woman who lived not far from the Pine Forest Park. We had our board at the Kurort cafeteria, where we paid in advance for the whole month to have three meals a day. In the morning we walked there for our breakfast, and from there it was a short walk to the bath and therapy building. There I received a therapy on the left side of my face with applications of hot mud from the Salty Lake. My mother was taking the spa treatments of warm *rapa*—the salty water from the lake—as a therapy to relax and relieve her nervous tension caused by the precarious situation of my father at work.

After the therapy session we walked back to the cafeteria for lunch and then, during the hot part of the day, we would have a long walk in the shady Pine Forest park, find a nice place to hang a hammock between two pine trees, and relax breathing the pure clean air scented with the pine trees' fragrance. We were borrowing books from the Kurort library and taking them with us everywhere to read. In the late afternoon, when the sun was low we went to the Salty Lake to sunbathe on the sandy beach, and I would have fun splashing in the warm salty water. But I never learned to swim.

The separate men's and women's beaches were surrounded on three sides with a high wooden fence that was extending far from the shore into the water. This fence was erected because there was no requirement to wear swimming suits, and most

women and girls on the beach were naked, although some wore their regular bras and panties and a few wore bathing suits. This custom was probably established because bathing suits were very hard to buy in the small town. One could always recognize the health resort visitors from the large cities where it was possible to buy swimming suits in the *Lux*<sup>5</sup> stores at the exorbitant prices. The adults, teenagers, and little girls and boys who were admitted there with their mothers were used to seeing the naked women on the beach as they were walking, lying on the sand, and bathing in the lake; and it seemed that nobody paid any attention to the nudity. But I was always amazed at how many different shapes and sizes the female body could develop and how ugly and deformed some of them were. I was glad that my mother had a slender figure.

From the beach my mother and I would go to the well maintained Kurort Park. Three were flower gardens, small fountains, and here and there were sculptures made from concrete. On the paved alleys were many benches to sit and rest on. Until supertime we would sit on a bench, enjoy the view of the well-groomed colorful flowerbeds, read books, and watch the people leisurely walking by.

On Sundays there were no therapy sessions and we took the local train called *Vyetka* and visited my grandfather in the town of Slavyansk. Since these were the years when I was growing fast, every summer my grandfather sewed for me a winter coat from one of my father's old wool suits. He would rip it apart on the seams, clean it, and turning the wrong, non-faded side out would combine the pieces to make me a straight coat with a quilted lining.

That summer my mother found herself a position teaching Russian in the Teachers' Technicum in Slavyansk<sup>6</sup> and right away received an apartment with one large room and a kitchen in the teachers' apartment building. My father immediately shipped our possessions from the hamlet of Kisyelyevka and joined us before the beginning of the school year. But he was not able to find a teaching position and stayed home for the whole year devoting himself to his hobby of photography.

In the back of the teachers' apartment house there was a big fruit garden with tall old pear and apple trees and a courtyard where I could play. In addition, all the neighbors had fruit gardens, trees, and flowering bushes. After living on the third floor in the dusty coal-miner hamlet of Kisyelyevka,<sup>7</sup> where there were no trees and no place to stay outside to play, this was a real haven for me.

In the whole apartment house there was only one girl of my age, Nina, a daughter of the Technicum's art teacher. We played together outside in good weather and mostly in her apartment when the weather was bad. Her father allowed us to use colored pencils and drawing paper and taught us some techniques. I still remember him showing us how to enlarge a design by drawing a smaller grid on it with a ruler and then to enlarge the design by drawing the shapes on the paper with the larger size grid. We also competed in drawing our own geometrical shapes on the graph paper and then coloring them.

We lived in that apartment for two years. One of the most enjoyable tasks in the fall was to climb the huge pear tree and collect the special sort of pears that we called "winter pears." They were hard and not ready to eat right away, but needed to remain indoors for a long time to ripen. While Nina, a few older boys and I climbed high on the tree, collected fruit from the branches in bags and brought them down, the teachers' families divided the crop under the tree. We had a supply of pears for several months,

selecting those to eat that were becoming ripe.

That old pear tree in the garden was so high that during some festivities when there were aerial exhibitions and parachute jumps at the small local airport, we would climb all the way to the top and from there enjoy the spectacle.

In the beginning of the summer we saw cherries that were ripening in a neighbor's fruit garden. There was a high wooden fence that we would climb and sit on, admiring the shiny red fruit that was out of our reach. Nina and I were very tempted by it. So, we invented a tool that allowed us to reach and pick the cherries. We cut two long sturdy branches from a bush and at the end of each we attached a wire shaped as a small circle with the pointed end that we squeezed as a beak that had just enough space to hold the stem of the cherry.

It was a difficult task to sit on the high fence holding yourself with one hand to keep from falling down and with the other hand holding the long rod and trying to center the cherry in the wire circle; then you had to pull it slowly up to the stem and with a quick tug tear it off. We would sit there "fishing" one cherry at a time and eating it right on the spot. We didn't collect the cherries to bring home—we knew that our parents would not approve.

For several days we "fished" the cherries without being seen, but finally the garden's owner caught us. He began to scream at us and to scare us that he would go and tell our parents. "Didn't your parents teach you that it is wrong to steal?" he asked us and ordered, "Give me those rods!" We surrendered them to him. He inspected them and shaking his head wondered at how cleverly we had made our tools. But he understood that we couldn't collect too many cherries with them. We knew that what we were doing was wrong and promised him that we would not do it again. He didn't come to complain to our parents, Nina and I had a good scare and a lesson that stealing even a few cherries was wrong.

Nina and I got along quite well, except she was jealous over a cat that belonged to someone in the building. Everybody was feeding him on the long porch where he stayed most of the time. One day I came to feed the cat at the same time when Nina was feeding him and she pushed me away, not allowing me to put the food in his dish. I had a big spoon in my hand and in defending myself I struck her hard on the forehead. I probably hurt her very much, because she began to cry and her father even complained to my mother. After that Nina didn't talk to me for a long time and I missed her company.

After this happened, my father gave me a little kitten that grew into a nice gentle light blue-gray cat named Murka. She kept me company, sleeping on my lap when I was doing my homework. She also slept on my bed, warming my feet that were always cold, even in the summer. My father taught Murka all kinds of tricks and made many photographs with her. Nina had no other girls to play with and she wanted to play with my kitten, so she made peace with me and as before we played together after school.

In the winter Nina and I used to join many other children and skate down the hill on Kharkovsky Street—now renamed Shevchenko Street—on the frozen snow that had been packed by passing carts, sleds, and rare automobiles. We had a special type of skates called *Snyegurochka* with rounded front points designed specifically for skating on the packed snow. It was great fun. When we would reach Railroad Street, sometimes we would go to the Shelkovychny<sup>8</sup> Park to skate on the frozen pond.

Nina had an older sister and a cousin living with the family in their one room-and-kitchen apartment. They both attended the Teachers' Technicum. Some evenings when I was playing with Nina in their kitchen I observed the beauty rituals of these two young women. I never before saw anyone else, and especially not my mother, groom as they did. They would use some kind of a liquid to wet their hair, then shape it with their fingers to make flat waves and secure them with bobby pins. Then they used a cream to spread on their faces and hands, and pulled the hair from their eyebrows with the tweezers to make them thin and shapely. For me, all of this was new. I found it strange that they devoted so much attention and time to these tasks. But they looked pretty and fashionable when they left home in the morning.

During the 1934-35 school year I attended the fifth grade in the Russian Seven-Years-School located all the way at the Shnurkovka stop of the local railroad branch. For me it was a very long walk, first down Kharkovsky Street to Railroad Street and then along the tracks to the next train stop. On my way I often encountered a boy from my class who lived in one of the houses on Kharkovsky Street and we walked to school together.

At that age boys are not interested in girls yet. But for me as a girl it was the first time that I had the companionship of a boy of my age. He was also a son of a teacher. His name was Fima<sup>9</sup> Zusmanovich and his nationality was Jewish.<sup>10</sup> Compared to the boys from the school in the hamlet of Kiselyevka who teased my friend Tamara and me, Fima was very polite and friendly. After a while I began to fantasize that I was in love with him and talked about him at home so much that my mother figured it out and asked me if I liked him. But I didn't give her a straight answer, being almost ashamed of this new feeling. Fimka, as everybody called him, also understood that I had a crush on him and he began to tease me about it, which I didn't like at all. This quickly changed my infatuation with him to disdain and I could never forgive him for it.

In the fifth grade I didn't have to work hard on the assignments, which I found to be easy and made good grades in all subjects. But that year was completely uneventful for me. I don't remember any of my teachers, and I didn't develop any friendships with girls or boys.

At home my father and I were helping my mother every evening to correct mountains of dictation papers of her students from the Teachers' Technicum, and sometimes my uncle Petya<sup>11</sup> also came to help us with this tedious chore. But this experience was very useful for me, since I learned the correct spelling of words, sentence structure, and punctuation in Russian.

My father didn't find employment that year and he was at home all day. He was involved with his photography hobby and was teaching me all the steps in picture taking, developing the negatives, printing, and enlarging the photos. I liked to be with him and was also enthusiastic about learning all the tricks

of the trade. We made many pictures during that year, experimenting with lighting, backgrounds, and enlargements.

In the summer of 1935 my mother and father were planning to go to Moscow for the graduation from the correspondence courses at the Moscow's Pedagogical Institute.<sup>12</sup> My mother applied and received an accommodation for me for one month in the *sanatory*<sup>13</sup> in Crimea in the resort town of Yevpatoria, the same place where I stayed a few years before.<sup>14</sup> My father accompanied me on the train to Crimea. This time I

didn't cry, as it was during my first visit there. Although I didn't like the strict daily routine and the constant organized activities, this time I had a very good time on the shore of the Black Sea. I made some friends; I especially remember one nice boy who liked to be with me very much, and we spent all our free time together. This friendship restored my confidence in boys—not all of them were teasers. We even exchanged addresses and wrote several letters to each other.

My father didn't go to Moscow with my mother. I found it very strange that he decided not to graduate that summer—he never explained to me the reasons. When my mother returned from Moscow with her diploma, I remember that I was very proud of her achievement. She was enthusiastic about the possibility of us moving to Moscow,<sup>15</sup> but I couldn't figure out why my father objected to this so emphatically. It was never explained to me and was kept as a secret for many years, although I was already old enough to understand.

In 1935-36 school year my father found a position teaching science in the Seven-Years-School that I attended, but that year I was transferred to the sixth grade in a smaller school on Kharkovsky Street closer to where we lived. Studying was very easy for me; I always had very good grades and I didn't have to put much effort into doing my homework. Having my friend Nina to play with, I didn't make any close friends in school.

I remember one very strange episode that happened in our school that year. During the physical education class that was held in the courtyard the teacher gave us a command to form three rows. I was standing at the end of the first row when from the other end the students began to laugh and the whole group exploded in laughing. Most of us didn't know what had happened but the laughing was contagious and the teacher couldn't stop us no matter how much she screamed. She ran into the office to complain. The school director came down from the door that was behind us and caught several students laughing—those who didn't see her coming—and I was among them. We were reprimanded and given notes to take to our parents. Before going home, I found out from other students that one of the girls at the other end of the row had her dress spotted with blood; some boys began to laugh and everybody just joined in without knowing the reason for it.

When I gave the note to my father and explained to him how this happened, he became furious. "That damn Communist! She calls herself an educator?—she doesn't know how to educate children! I will tell her this tomorrow."

My mother tried to calm him down, "Orest, be careful please, don't use those words in the presence of your daughter."

"Oh, Mama, I am already used to hearing this from Papa. Don't you worry, I am old enough to know not to tell these things to anyone."

My mother looked at my father and shook her head, reproaching him for not being careful.

The next morning my father came to school with me and we went directly to the office of the school director comrade Malikova who, like all bureaucrats in executive positions in the Soviet Union, was an inveterate Bolshevik.

After listening to the accusatory words of Malikova against me, my father in turn accused her harshly by telling her that she didn't even investigate the incident thoroughly to find out that most of the students had no idea why everybody was laughing. He told her, "If you had to punish someone for what happened, you should

punish those who started it, not those who were at the other end of the row! You were interested only in finding scapegoats, not the real culprits. What kind of education is this to punish innocent children?"

"But I caught your daughter laughing," she justified herself.

"All students were laughing," replied my father. "Why haven't you punished them all?"

Malikova became very upset because my father was accusing her in my presence and, being aware that her reputation was diminished in my eyes, she dismissed him quickly without arguing anymore. However, she didn't impose any punishment on me. And her well-known reputation as a strict disciplinarian feared by most of the pupils forever disappeared from my mind. After this incident, she lost all authority in my eyes and I was not afraid of her anymore. I knew that if she again accused me unfairly, my father would defend me.

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1. See the chapter "Return to My Hometown of Slavyansk."
  2. Health resort.
  3. See the chapter "Hamlet Kisyelyevka."
  4. See the chapters "White Army Volunteers," "Home at Last," "It's Time To Go!" and "Nikitovka's Last Gentleman."
  5. Luxury stores.
  6. See the chapter "Return to My Hometown of Slavyansk."
  7. See the chapter "Hamlet Kisyelyevka."
  8. Mulberry.
  9. Nickname for Yefim.
  10. In the Soviet Union Jewish was considered a nationality, rather than religion.
  11. The youngest brother of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky.
  12. See the chapter "The Keynote Speaker at the Teachers' Conference."
  13. Health resort with rehabilitation facilities.
  14. See the chapter "Father Returns To Live With Us."
  15. See the chapter "The Keynote Speaker at the Teachers' Conference."

## The Keynote Speaker At The Conference

**By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**

**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

Sometime in 1935 all Soviet newspapers, even those in the smaller provincial towns, printed a photograph of Comrade Khrushchev, who was appointed as the new First Secretary of the Committee of the Communist Bolshevik Party of Moscow District<sup>1</sup>. A short article about his political career stated that the new first secretary was of proletarian origins, that he took part in the civil war on the southern front, that he worked as a coal miner in Donbass, and studied at the Rabfak of the Donetsk Coalminers' Technicum, and that he graduated from the Moscow Industrial Academy. In the major newspaper "Pravda" they described him as a distinguished representative of the post revolutionary generation of communist workers brought up by the great Stalin

himself. Then I saw his photograph again in our local newspaper and I read underneath: "Nikita Syergyeyevich Khrushchev."

"Khrushchev!" I exclaimed and showed my husband a photograph. "Doesn't it sound familiar to you the name of Nikita Khrushchev?"

"Yes," replied my husband, "and the face looks very familiar, too."

"Is it possible, that he is the one I taught Russian language to thirteen years ago at the Rabfak in Yusovka?"<sup>2</sup>

"Sure, sure, there is no doubt, he is the one!"

"Look, in the article it says that he had studied at the Rabfak of the Donetsk Coalminers' Technicum where I had taught!"

"That's right," my husband confirmed after reading the article.

"Is it possible," I asked, "that he received enough educational background at the Rabfak to be admitted to and graduate from the academy? And what kind of educational institution is it?"

"I have no idea," said my husband. "But 'academy' sounds very impressive."

"But I don't remember that Khrushchev was such an outstanding student capable of attending such a prestigious institution," I reflected. "However, at that time he was certainly very active in the Communist Party."

But it wasn't surprising that the former half-illiterate Nikita, who didn't even have any record of revolutionary activity in the past, had reached such a high position within the Communist Party apparatus so quickly. There were many new party leaders with similar backgrounds. But from his rapid rise to such a high position within the Bolshevik Party, one could conclude that Khrushchev learned well how the party apparatus worked and he obviously very quickly mastered all ins and outs of high party leaders' cabinets. And I suddenly remembered my former student Khrushchev's admiration of a popular hero, Pugachev, when he commented about him in my class: "He was a cunning muzhik, wasn't he? And how quick-witted he was in his moves! He outsmarted them all!"<sup>3</sup> And I thought, "Cunning Nikita, on the sly, he was able to get to power."

For the masses he was a new man since until now his name had never been used so widely in the national press. But it should be mentioned that the common people were mostly indifferent to the names of persons holding Communist Party positions, they were more interested in settling their personal lives. In any case, for me it was a big surprise to find out that my former student Nikita Khrushchev came into power.

From then on, the newspapers started to report more and more about him and to print his photographs, and some were with Stalin himself, which was a sure sign of being admitted to the high power circle of the Communist Party apparatus.

The same year, I went to Moscow<sup>4</sup> in the summer for my final examinations and to defend my thesis as a candidate for a degree in Russian language and literature. For four years my husband and I had been studying at the correspondence courses for teachers. The courses were offered for the first time by the Moscow Pedagogical Institute to those who were already teaching with various qualifications, but now were required to have a degree from an institution of higher learning.

This was our last year of studies, and to be admitted to the final examinations the institute required all students to present their autobiography, documents about the student's right to vote, and father's pre-revolutionary social status issued by the Town's

Soviet; for the male students, their military card was required as well. Since he had been a *lishenyets*<sup>5</sup> and former White Army volunteer,<sup>6</sup> my husband could not present all those documents with politically clean connotations; he had no other choice but to not apply for the final exams. His only hope was that with the shortage of teachers his four years of successful studies at the institute would be considered as quasi equivalent to a degree. Therefore, I went to Moscow alone.

When I arrived at the institute, I saw a huge poster in the lobby with the announcement that by the initiative of the First Secretary of the Committee of the Communist Bolshevik Party of Moscow District, Comrade Nikita Khrushchev, was organized a conference of Moscow region teachers. I thought, "Maybe I could seize an opportunity and try to see my former student. It seems to be a very appropriate event for such an encounter. All I need is to get a ticket for the conference." I went to the institute's office and asked for a ticket.

"The conference is only for the teachers of the Moscow region," replied one of the employees.

"Well," I answered boldly, "it is an exceptional case. You see, I am a former teacher of Comrade Khrushchev and would like to meet him after so many years."

Of course, right away I saw a surprise on the faces of all present in the office. Somebody asked me, "How it could be, you look like you are of the same age as he is?"

"It's true," I answered, "but he was my student in 1922-24 when he was about twenty-eight years old."

More questions followed from the office employees. When they were convinced of my story, they handed me a ticket.

Back in the students' dormitory, when some of the teachers from the correspondence courses found out that I was going to see Khrushchev, they entrusted me to ask him when there would be, finally, a raise in the salaries of *shkrabs*,<sup>7</sup> as all were called who worked in the schools including the teachers.

The conference was held in the evening in the Chaikovsky Concert Hall. When I arrived, the hall was already full of delegates. As I looked around, I saw mostly young faces. I was able to find a very comfortable seat, right in the middle of the row and quite close to the stage. In the center of the stage there was a long table covered with a bright red heavy cloth, and the representatives of the presidium and of the secretariat of the conference were already seated. Shortly after, somebody seated on the stage asked everyone to take their seats. As the humming in the hall turned into a barely detectable faint sound, the president of the conference announced the opening of "The 1935 Conference of Moscow District Teachers" and then introduced Comrade Khrushchev as a keynote speaker. Khrushchev walked on stage and all attending the conference stood up and greeted him with a long applause.

Comrade Khrushchev took a place at the podium and started his speech. I was observing with great interest how he was conducting himself, his manners and especially his speech, trying to catch the details of how much my former student had improved in his education. I was surprised that he didn't have a speech carefully prepared in advance, but was speaking impromptu, to suit the occasion. Therefore, it was easy for me to compare his speech patterns and manners with those he had thirteen years ago, as I remembered them.

From the first words I could recognize that he had mastered very well the

technique of addressing meetings, the communist jargon, and the words and phrases coined by the party. As I remember it now after so many years, he started his speech by greeting teachers from the Central Committee of the Communist Party and praising the party's wise leadership and guidance in a victorious building of socialism. He followed it with a profuse tribute to Stalin, the leader of the communism and father of the working masses of the whole world. He spoke solemnly and pronouncing each word clearly and distinctly.

In the main portion of his speech, Khrushchev called on the teachers to steadfastly follow the great Communist Party line on each step of bringing up and training the future generations of the builders of socialism. Then he reminded them about Lenin's promise to put the educators in the socialist society so high in prestige, as they "never been, or are they now, or they never would be" in the capitalist world.

Then he changed his tone of voice to a higher pitch and in place of pathos his speech became colored with threats. He started to urge all teachers to increase their vigilance and to watch for the "enemies of the people," for the "Trotskyites,"<sup>8</sup> for the "agents of the fascists," for the "spies," the "wreckers," the "saboteurs," the "rightists," and the "leftists" stooges, and all others who were trying to interfere with the building of socialism. After the pathetic expressions of this kind, his speech was interrupted several times with applause from the audience.

Khrushchev was so involved in the political correctness of his speech and in the emotional effect on his listeners that he was not concerned about speaking grammatically. He was constantly changing the expression on his face according to the context. He either had a very stern face, or was knitting his eyebrows, or raising them and opening his eyes wide, or he was making his face look angry or menacing. And when his emotions would become so high that he couldn't find any more words to express what he wanted to say, he would start to help himself by making energetic gestures with his hands and arms, a distinct trait which I remembered from his years as a student. He would strike his chest with his fist, or raise his right hand with a pointed finger at some invisible enemy, or he would menacingly raise his arm high above his head and with a tight fist threaten the "imperialists," "capitalists," "world bourgeoisie," "instigators of war," and all those who were obstacles on the road to building socialism-communism.

After this litany Khrushchev solemnly declared, "Anyone who would dare to infringe on our victorious march toward building communism will be crashed, squashed, and destroyed once and for all!" Grand applause by the teachers followed.

Finally, the speaker came to the end of his speech when he had to make his final conclusions. This was the most important and the most pathetic part of his speech. At this point Khrushchev expressed his loyalty and devotion to the Communist Party and its great leader Stalin. But it wasn't a speech anymore; it was a song of praise with the never-ending repetition of a leitmotif "*Da sdravstvuyet*," which means "Long live" followed by many communists' clichés such as: "Long live our leader and teacher, great Stalin!" "Long live our Bolshevik Communist Party!" "Long live proletariats of the whole world!"

Of course, each "Long live" was followed by unanimous applause in the hall. The psychological effect was indisputably tremendous. I also clapped my hands and stood, up following the crowd. Like everybody else in the hall, I had to show my "spontaneous

and sincere enthusiasm” to these nauseating exaltations, because you never knew who was sitting next to you, or behind you, and could report on you...

When Khrushchev finished his speech, I felt complete disappointment. I expected from such a highly positioned leader and keynote speaker something new, original, expressing his own ideas and opinions. Instead, his speech had a stereotyped pattern, like most of the speeches of the other party leaders. He did not introduce even one word of his own; everything he said was exactly according to the instructions of the party and *Agitprop*<sup>9</sup> literature. All slogans and clichés were word for word the same as one could read them in the newspapers “Pravda” and “Isvestia.”

As far as his language, it was as before, a mixture of popular Russian and some Ukrainian words, and I didn’t observe any noticeable changes in his patterns of speech. Very often his sentences were constructed incorrectly and many times, because of the long deviations from the subject, the logical connections between the phrases and sentences were absent. But, notwithstanding all of these mannerisms, poor speech patterns, and a constant use of coined phrases, when he finished his speech, all had understood the message of what he intended to convey to the teachers—he called upon the teachers to bring up their pupils in the spirit of socialism-communism.

I have to confess that I felt ashamed for my student’s shortcomings in Russian language and also to some degree for myself, as his former teacher, and was almost happy that nobody who was sitting close to me knew that he was my former student. “However,” I thought, “comrade Zablodsky, his former teacher of the political education at Rabfak, would have been very proud of his student.”

But all my impressions did not interfere with my idea of encountering Khrushchev in person. The question was, how to do it? Right when I was contemplating it, from the stage somebody announced that if there were any questions to the speaker, the teachers could write them on a piece of paper and pass them to the table. I saw small pieces of paper being passed forward from row to row. I took a whole page from my notebook and wrote simply: “Comrade Khrushchev, I am your former teacher from the Rabfak in Yuzovka and I would like to say hello to you.” My idea was, that the big piece of paper would give me a chance to see when it was forwarded to him and I would be able to observe his reaction to it. In fact, the size of paper had an immediate result—it was forwarded to Khrushchev first—although the other papers had arrived at the table before mine. I saw that he was smiling when he was reading my note.

But to my surprise, when all the questions were answered and the conference was declared closed, the heavy curtain fell down and covered the stage, I hadn’t received any answer to my note and was losing my hope to encounter my famous former student. Everybody in the hall remained in their seats waiting for the concert to be held as an entertainment for the conferees.

After a while a group of people, including those who were sitting at the big table on the stage during the conference, came from the side door and one of them was holding a big piece of paper, which he was waving. He loudly announced, “Is a person, who wrote this note still here?” I understood that he was holding my paper and that he was referring to me. I still remember that I was suddenly overcome by a feeling of agitation as I was making my way toward the aisle between the people sitting in the chairs.

I stopped in the aisle waiting to see if my former student, who was standing in

front of the group, would recognize me or not. I saw Khrushchev smiling; then he came closer reaching out his hand to greet me.

"Do you recognize me?" I asked.

"Yes, of course I remember, you were teaching me Russian language!"

His simplicity won over my excitement and I felt at ease. He invited me to sit next to him during the concert in the first row where commissars and all members of the presidium and secretariat of the conference were sitting. I remember that Bubnov, the commissar of the People's Commissariat of Education, observed Khrushchev and me talking, and joined us in conversation. And I remember very well that he asked me if Khrushchev was a good student and how many times I had to punish him by putting him in a corner when he didn't remember the right answers for declinations<sup>10</sup> of nouns, pronouns and adjectives. And I detected a veiled joke by the Commissar Bubnov, who made a delicate hint to me that he was also aware of Khrushchev's shortcomings in Russian grammar.

Before the concert started, I carefully observed my former student. I remembered him at the Rabfak when he was skinny, with hollow cheeks, wearing a visor cap and dressed like a real proletarian. Now, he had noticeably put on some weight, his face and cheeks had become rounded, and he was looking more like a capitalist with a visible belly and quite a large bald spot on his head. He was still wearing a traditional Russian shirt with buttons on one side, and a wide stand-up collar. However, I noticed that the shirt was made of a very good quality fabric and was perfectly hand-embroidered. The blue cornflowers embroidered with silk yarn were shining on the collar, cuffs, and hem border of the shirt. The shirt was tied around his waist with a narrow leather belt with silver tips hanging at the ends. As before, he wore high boots, but now they were made from good quality soft leather and were shined to perfection. But more than anything else, I noticed his apparent self confidence. He behaved like he was in charge of the situation.

The concert was wonderful. All famous artists and singers, whom I had occasionally heard on the radio, were taking part in the concert and were performing one after another: Barsova, Lyemyeshev, Kozlovsky, David Oistrakh, Ryna Zelyenaya, and many others. I was impressed that Khrushchev knew all of them well. He was telling me something about each of them and was commenting on their performance. I had to admit to myself that in this knowledge my former student as a dweller of the capital city had surpassed his teacher who lived in the province.

I was sitting on the left of Khrushchev and it was easy for me to observe him because he had to turn somewhat to see the center of the stage. Now that he was not giving an engaging speech and didn't have to act, his face had transformed. It was pleasant to see him being himself in his natural simplicity. And I saw again his smiling eyes as I remembered them from many years ago. He looked as though he was enjoying the concert immensely. When Barsova had finished singing his preferred song "Polyushko-Polye," it gave him such pleasure that he couldn't stop applauding, and she repeated it a second time.

The concert was going on for a long time and I suddenly remembered that I had not yet asked Khrushchev the question delegated to me by the teachers. Finally, I caught a moment during a short break and stated my question straightforward, "Nikita Syergievich, are you aware about the situation of the teachers? What do you think,

isn't it time for us to get a raise?"

"I know that the situation has to be improved. In April you will have a raise," he said concisely and forcibly, like he had decided this question already a long time ago.

"Thank you for the good news," I answered with a real feeling of gratitude in my voice.

I wanted to listen to the end of the concert, but I was worrying about how I would get to the students' dormitory. It was already late and I couldn't catch the last streetcar or bus. I got up during the next break and started to say good-bye to Nikita Syergeyevich.

He was very surprised and asked me, "Why are you leaving? Don't you want to stay until the end of such unusual concert?"

"Yes, very much. But it is late, Nikita Syergeyevich, and I am afraid there will be no streetcars or buses to get back to the dormitory."

He quickly turned to the second row, where all his aides-de-camp were sitting and categorically ordered, "At once, immediately, give an order for the buses for transporting all delegates home after the concert to come to the door of the Concert Hall. Also, announce to all delegates that they can stay and listen to the concert until the end and not worry about the streetcars and buses, the transportation will be available!"

He said all this with a tone of voice that did not allow for any objection. It was clear that he was already used to issuing commands and ordering people about. His orders were immediately executed, but regretfully for some delegates it was too late; many had already left.

When the concert was over, I thought that for the second time in my teaching career I had to say farewell to Khrushchev and asked him, "Do you remember what you said to me at our previous parting?"

"Only the mountains cannot move, but persons may always see each other again," we repeated together a proverb and we both started to laugh.

When he shook my hand, I said, "Well, Nikita Syergeyevich, until we meet again!"

Very late that night the special bus took us to the door of the institute's dormitory, which was located near the Novodyevichy Monastery. In the morning with a vain hope I searched in the newspapers for some mention of my encounter with Khrushchev. But this happening was left unnoticed by the press and by the public. How could it be ignored? That evening, I was the only woman sitting with the communist leaders in the first row during the whole concert. This was at a time when powerful leaders did not appear in public with their wives. It was very unusual for Khrushchev, as for any other communist leader of his status, to appear in public place with a common mortal not belonging to the circle of the privileged communist hierarchy. This demonstrated that news reporters could report in the press only "politically important" events and their reports probably were planned and authorized in advance.

When I started to describe my encounter with Khrushchev to the teachers in our dormitory, they didn't show great interest in my story. They impatiently asked me, "How about the raise in our salaries? Did you ask him?"

"Yes," I answered, disillusioned with their indifference to hearing details about the life of one of the high-ranking communist leaders. And I replied distinctly, "Khrushchev's exact words were, 'In April you will have a raise.'"

They commented with skepticism, "They all promise a lot!"

"But we always have to wait and wait!"

"And we have been waiting already for a long, long time!"

But I was really surprised when shortly after my departure from Moscow it was announced that beginning the first of April the teachers would receive a substantial increase in their salaries that had been substandard for many years compared to the common workers' pay. I remembered well that date and my thought, "Either Khrushchev knew already the date when the raise to the teachers pay would be announced, or he was already powerful enough to promote the teachers' raise and kept his word."

I passed my final examinations with flying colors and I successfully defended my thesis in Russian language. My topic was some Russian grammar problems that I had encountered by working with the adult students.

There was a ceremony dedicated to the first graduation of students from the pedagogical correspondence course of the Moscow Pedagogical Institute. The students were congratulated by some officials from the Central Commissariat of People's Education, by the director of the institute, and by the dean of the correspondence course. The students were told that they could receive their diplomas in the dean's office the next day. All students were relieved that this milestone in their education had been reached and that they could present their credentials to their Republic's Commissariat of People's Education, which would issue them a certificate, called *Attestat*,<sup>11</sup> for a title of secondary school teacher.

When I went the next day to the dean's office to receive my diploma, I had to wait in line because most of the students were out of town and they wanted to receive them as soon as possible. When it was my turn, the secretary gave me my diploma and told me that the dean wanted to talk to me. I was puzzled, because all the others had gotten their paper and left.

I waited patiently until the dean was ready to receive me and was surprised to hear his friendly greetings. He told me that my name had been suggested by the Department of Russian Language and Literature as a possible candidate for the *aspirantura*, as it was called, postgraduate studentship, and that I had a good chance to receive a grant from the institute for the next school year. He advised me that I should apply for it as soon as possible and that the secretary would give me all the forms and instructions for the application. I was astonished with this offer, because I had never expected it or even dreamt about.

I remember that I only said, "It's so unexpected that I can't give you an answer right away. But I am very grateful for your offer."

In dismissing me the dean advised, "It is a great opportunity for you. I heard that you are almost assured to be accepted; don't wait too long with your application."

I took the forms from the secretary and she told me that they had to be back in the office before the end of that month. I was glad that there was enough time to go home and make a decision by discussing it with my husband.

During my long trip home in the train I had plenty of time to think about the opportunity of being accepted as an *aspirant*, a graduate student and lecturer, that for some unknown reason had been presented to me on a silver platter. I wondered if this offer was made because of my thesis, or because someone had found out that I was Khrushchev's teacher. But this was not as important as the opportunity to enhance my career in education. I could eventually teach in the institutes or even in the universities.

I was thinking, "What a challenge it would be in teaching the teachers how to teach, to share with them my experience gained during all these years... And then, it also would mean living in a larger town or a city, maybe even to remain in Moscow. What great opportunities would be available here for my daughter! The life in a big city would offer a lot of cultural activities, theaters, museums..." Everything seemed to be so wonderful in my imagination. I could not think about anything that would be bad or difficult in accepting this offer. The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced that I could finally look for a brighter future in my career. I could not think about anything that might interfere with this lucky opportunity; all I needed to do was to take it.

When I arrived home in Slavyansk, after greet-ing my husband my first words were, "You wouldn't believe what wonderful news I have to tell you! At the institute, the department of Russian language and literature has offered me *aspirantura* for the next school year.

"What?!" exclaimed my husband.

I joyfully repeated, "They offered me *aspirantura*."

He looked at me amazed that I could be so happy about it and asked anxiously, "By any chance, you didn't accept it yet?"

"No," I replied. "There are a lots of forms to be completed and I decided that you and I could do it together."

"Thank God!" he said with relief, "You scared me."

"Why? It is a wonderful opportunity for me to improve my career in education. In a few years I could qualify to teach in the institutions of higher learning, maybe even remain in Moscow..."

My husband didn't allow me to continue and asked, "And what about me?"

"We would all move to Moscow, at least for the time I will be on *aspirantura*," I replied convincingly. "And you probably could find some teaching position there easier than here."

"Tonya," my husband interrupted me, "stop dreaming and think. Tell me, what would you write in the questionnaires about your husband's political past?"

He looked at me expecting an explanation. I suddenly felt like a child who had been shown a candy he really wanted, but his father abruptly told him he couldn't have it.

My husband saw that I had no answer and suggested, "If you really want to pursue *aspirantura*, the only way to solve this problem is for us to get a divorce. Then you could leave your husband and his past political sins behind and be free to pursue your career."

I was devastated by his answer. But I didn't give up yet my hope and calmed my husband by saying, "Let's not make this decision so quickly. We have plenty of time to consider the other less radical choices." And I changed the subject by asking what he had done while I was away. And he had also some good news.

After many hours of discussing with my husband the possible solutions for my *aspirantura* and by carefully going over the numerous forms and questionnaires that I had to fill in, and by inspecting a list of documents that had to be submitted with the application, I had to admit that my husband was right. They required the documents issued by the Town Soviet about my father's and my husband's past and present social status. I came to the conclusion that I probably had very little chance of being accepted;

since both my father and my husband were deprived of civil rights—they both were *lishenyets*—I certainly could not submit such documents. Therefore, I had to give up my short lived dream and remain teaching another year in the Teachers' Technicum in my hometown of Slavyansk.

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Moya vstryecha s N. S. Khrushchevym v Moskvye: Glavnyi orator" [in Russian], *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniakh* [Nikita Khrushchev In My Memoirs], MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro, trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993.

2. See the chapters "A Rabfak Student - Nikita Khrushchev" and "Khrushchev as a Political Figure at Rabfak."

3. See the chapter "A Rabfak Student - Nikita Khrushchev."

4. See the chapter "Return to My Hometown of Slavyansk."

5. See the chapter "Nikitovka's Last Gentleman."

6. See the chapter "White Army Volunteers."

7. *Shkrab* – acronym for *Shkolny rabotnyk* - school worker.

8. Followers of the exiled revolutionary leader Trotsky.

9. *Agitprop* – acronym for *Agitaziya i Propaganda* - Agitation and Propaganda.

10. In Russian language nouns, pronouns, and adjectives take the inflected forms to convey their meaning.

11. A copy of the Attestat was written in Ukrainian and Russian—as all official documents at that time were written two languages - Russian and the language of the Soviet Republic where it was issued.

## The Newspaper's Proofreader

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

When I was in Moscow,<sup>1</sup> my husband went to the Slavyansk's Commissariat of People's Education to inquire about the availability of teaching positions for him for the next school year. Since they had his application on file from last summer for a position as a teacher of biology, chemistry, or science, he was in luck, there was an opening to teach science in the Russian *Semilyetka*, the Seven-Years-School, and he accepted this position for the 1935-36 school year.

At the same time, because my husband's application in *Narobras* has been on file from last year, they didn't check his political past at that time because there were no positions available. And this year they didn't do it either, probably believing that it was done last year. So far it was overlooked and he didn't have to worry.

After several years of teaching adults at the Rabfak where discipline was never a problem, my husband found teaching children of the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades very difficult. These were not like the obedient peasants' children he had taught in the village school.<sup>1</sup> The town's children had no respect for teachers and disrupted lessons with pranks and misbehavior.

Right from the first days of teaching the problem of discipline overwhelmed him. It was an unending battle with the pupils, who at that age were hard to control in the classroom. My husband was returning home very nervous and he began again to have

strong stomach pain as he had before in Kisyelyevka. The doctor diagnosed it as a stomach ulcer and suggested he change his occupation. But to what? He was an experienced teacher with adult students and an effective administrator, but he couldn't find such positions here in Slavyansk.

He endured teaching there almost the whole 1935-36 school year in spite of the problems with students' discipline. And when he came home, he would lie in bed holding a hot bottle against his stomach to calm the pain. I was becoming very worried about his health. The doctor ordered that he have a bland diet, drink lots of milk, and drink a special brand of mineral water that was considered helpful for neutralizing stomach acid.

One day at the market I encountered Maria Sergyeyevna Sydorenko, married name Litvinova. She was my sister Tanya's girlfriend from the old days when we all attended gymnasium, and she lived almost across the street from my father's home. She had remained to live with her second husband, her daughter Zoya, and her old mother in her mother's home on Kharkovsky Street. She had been working for many years as a clerk in the supplies room of the local printing house. It was located in the old Kotlyarov's printing house where she and my sister Tanya worked after graduating from the gymnasium.

I shared my concern with Maria Sergyeyevna about my husband's health. "The doctor suggested my husband change his work, but it is not so easy to change one's profession."

To my surprise, Maria Sergyeyevna asked me, "How is his knowledge of the written Ukrainian language? Would he be able to correct spelling? They are desperately looking for a good proofreader for our local newspaper that, as you know, is printed in Ukrainian."

"Well, he speaks, reads, and writes well in Ukrainian. I think he could do it. He taught for two years in the Ukrainian school in the village."

Then she warned, "The only problem for him could be that this work will be at night when the newspaper is being printed."

I told her that I would mention this to my husband and he should decide if he feels that he could do this work.

When I mentioned this to my husband, he had a mixed reaction to it. On one side, he liked it, because it was quiet work and he was confident about the knowledge of the language. On the other side, he was afraid that to work in the Bolshevik newspaper he probably would be checked and rechecked as a politically reliable person. We discussed if it was worth all this risk and finally he decided to apply for the position. He reasoned, "If they are desperate to find somebody, maybe they won't be so thorough in checking my past."

The next day he went to the editorial office of the newspaper "*Bilshovyk*"<sup>2</sup> and asked if they were still looking for a proofreader. He was immediately led for an interview with the editor-in-chief, Bolshevik I.T. Mukhyn, who had already been advised by Maria Sergyeyevna about my husband's qualifications. He was hired on the spot. My husband gave his resignation as a teacher, and immediately began his new employment at the newspaper office.

Comrade Mukhyn told my husband, "Orest Mikhailovich, your responsibility will be to check grammar, the right Ukrainian spelling of words, and the correctness of

sentences. You are not responsible for the content of the articles; we have another person—a censor—who is responsible for checking the political correctness of everything that is printed in the newspaper.”

My husband found this work to be of his liking and he felt very comfortable working at night; it didn’t bother him at all.

As time passed, nobody asked him anything about his social status, or about his military registration, probably believing that the local *Narobras* had already checked him before as a teacher. It appeared that my husband had found an ideal place to work where nobody was bothering him and nobody was interested in getting his job.

But for me at the Teachers’ Technicum things were not becoming easier. During my second year of teaching there the assistant director’s captiousness toward me became worse. He was purposefully coming to the teachers’ room when I was there knowing well that I was talking with the other teachers in Russian. He would always sternly remind us, “Comrade teachers, speak in Ukrainian, don’t forget that this is the Ukrainian Technicum!” Then he began to resort to trivial faultfinding about how I was teaching.

And finally he found another way of giving me trouble; he investigated who my father was before the revolution. One day I was summoned to the office of the Technicum’s director, who was a Jew; his Ukrainian language was not as perfect as it could be and he was glad that he could speak with me in Russian.

He told me, “Antonina Gavriylovna, it was brought to my attention by the assistant director that when you applied for the teaching position here, you concealed the socioeconomic background of your father, who before the revolution was a petty bourgeois who owned a tailor shop where he exploited the apprentices. And, in addition, he owned several houses!”

“My father, Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnuy, has lived in this town all of his life,” I proudly replied. “He was and is a master tailor and he continues to work from his home, as he did in the past. There was no need to conceal anything because everybody in this town knows this. The houses were built with money borrowed from the bank, and they were requisitioned by the Soviet government before he could repay the loan; my father never owned them outright. Therefore, there was nothing to hide about it. You may find out all the facts about my father’s past without any difficulty.”

The director obviously had relied on the words of his assistant director and hadn’t investigated himself. He didn’t question me further and dismissed me without commenting about it. He never bothered me again about this matter.

After this happened, the assistant director continued with more persistence to annoy me with his carping. And at the end of the school year I decided to try to find another teaching position in town. I inquired at the Slavyansk’s Commissariat of People’s Education about openings for the next school year in teaching Russian. As I expected, there were some positions available and I was offered to teach Russian language and literature in the Ukrainian Seven-Years-School. I accepted this position for the 1936-37 school year.

I resigned immediately from my teaching in the Teacher’s Technicum. However, with my resignation, I was losing my right to live in the Technicum teachers’ apartments and we began to look for a new place to live.

When I went to see my father and asked him if he had heard from some of his

customers about apartments to rent, he said, "There is one good apartment in the home of your stepmother's brother, Dmytry Pyetrovich Boyko. He just finished his half of the newly built home and is looking for renters who would pay him the rent in advance; then he can finish the other apartment and make it ready for rent. If you have money to pay him in advance, you better go right away before he finds somebody else."

And my stepmother told me, "It is a good brick house that my brother just built. And next door in a smaller house our sister lives with her grown-up children and grandchildren. Tell my brother that it was I and your father who told you about the apartment. He shall be happy to rent it to relatives, rather than to some strangers."

We went to see it right away and indeed we liked the place. The owner was also glad to rent it to someone he knew. It was a well-built house of brick and our apartment had a separate entrance into a large kitchen, with one larger and one smaller room on each end of it. All woodwork, walls, and the nice wood floor were new and needed only to be painted. We could never find anything better than this. We especially liked that it was almost a relative of mine and it gave us an additional incentive, the privacy of the place and the security of being with a family that we could trust.

In the back of all the houses on that side of the street there was a big space with fruit and vegetable gardens that were back-to-back with the lots of the parallel street on the other side of the land. In the courtyard was a summer kitchen, if we wished to use it, and farther on were an earth cellar and an outhouse.

We moved to the new apartment as soon as it was ready. For my husband it was almost the same distance to walk to the printing house as before, but I had to walk quite a distance to the school, which was on the other end of town in the direction of Kurort. But the location was so nice, and it was much closer to Lyalya's new school, which she had to start in the fall.

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1. See the chapter "The Keynote Speaker at the Teachers' Conference."

2. Ukrainian spelling of *Bolshevik*.

## Being a Part Of the Big Berezhnoy Family

By Olga Gladky Verro

My mother complained for some time that the assistant director of the Teachers' Technicum was making her life difficult by seizing any chance to find all kinds of faults. She explained to me that he was Ukrainian nationalist who hated Russians and targeted his hatred on her because she was teaching Russian. Therefore, at the end of the school year my mother resigned from teaching there and we had to vacate the teachers' apartment.

In the beginning of summer we rented and moved into the recently finished, clean-as-a-whistle apartment in the new house of my grandmother's<sup>1</sup> brother, Dmitry Pyetrovich Boyko, at Number 12 on Kalinin Street. It was a very nice apartment with two rooms and a kitchen, with big windows allowing plenty of light and sunshine. There

were many fruit trees in the backyard, a big vegetable garden, and a courtyard where I could play. But I regretted losing my playmate Nina, who lived now very far away, and I was upset that there were no girls my age to play with in the new neighborhood.

However, that summer my mother's older sister Tanya,<sup>2</sup> with her husband Solomon Moisyeyevich Tatarsky and their only daughter Murochka,<sup>3</sup> came to visit my grandfather and us in Slavyansk. Also at that time my aunt Nyusya<sup>4</sup> arrived from Kharkov to see her father and to take spa treatments at the Slavyansk Kurort to relieve her nervous breakdown; she still suffered from the death of her son Talik.<sup>5</sup> She had just recently returned from a medical expedition in a remote Asiatic region of the Soviet Union. There, as an eye doctor, she was on a mission to eradicate the contagious eye illness trachoma and to perform eye operations to prevent blindness resulting from it.

When my mother's sisters arrived, their father Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy invited them all for a dinner. My mother and I were also present. But my father was visiting his sisters at that time. My mother's sister-in-law Musya,<sup>6</sup> the wife of my uncle Ivan,<sup>7</sup> was also invited. She lived with her daughter Lyalya (Yelena) in Slavyansk, while for some reason unknown to me at that time, her husband, my uncle Ivan, was always working somewhere in another town. My uncle Petya,<sup>8</sup> who came for the summer to stay with his father, was also there.

In my grandmother's home—she always emphasized that it was *her* home—there was hardly a space for everybody to sit at the table that stood at the end of the room where the icon and the oil lamp hung in the corner. At the other end of the room there was a huge bed, and across from it stood a big wardrobe, leaving a narrow passage.

My grandfather was very happy to see so many of his children gathered together and visiting him at the same time. My grandmother prepared a big dinner almost as festive as she used to do in the last two years when we were invited to celebrate the Easter and Christmas Holidays with my grandfather and her sons from the first marriage.

It was a joyous occasion for everybody who gathered there. There was a lot to talk about and to share with each other: news about their families, children, and work. Being together with all of my mother's relatives and hearing their recollections about their past and present life was a memorable occasion for me. I suddenly became aware of being a member of the big Berezhnoy family. At the center of it was my grandfather, an old patriarch, with gray hair, beard, and mustache that hid his smile. But his eyes smiled as he looked with pride at his children and grandchildren.

At that time I was already skillful in using a camera. I placed it on a tripod, focused to include everybody, and made a photograph<sup>9</sup> of the family members that were present.

My aunt Tanya stayed in Slavyansk for only a few days because her husband Solomonchik—as we affectionately called him—had to return to work. They left my cousin Murochka to stay with us for three weeks. For Murochka it was a real vacation to stay in the small town of Slavyansk where there were many trees and plenty of places to play outside. Where they lived in the semi-basement apartment of a huge brick building in the central part of the big industrial town of Stalino,<sup>10</sup> she was confined playing either inside or on the sidewalk under their windows.

Murochka was a very pretty girl with dark tresses and she resembled her mother a lot. She was about three years younger than I and we had lots of fun playing together.

There was a comfortable place for her to stay in our apartment. We stayed in one room, she slept in my bed, and I slept on the sofa, while my parents had their bed in another room. On some days my mother took us to the Kurort to rest in the pine forest park and play on the sandy beach or splash in the water of the Salty Lake.

That summer I really enjoyed the visit of my younger cousin because it was the first time that she had stayed with us. I took many pictures of Murochka and she liked most of them. But being a very sensitive girl, she detested one photo—the one I photographed her while she was licking the sweet foam from a plate where my mother had skimmed it while cooking preserves. And she also didn't like it when I teased her about something.

Previously, when she was too young, it was I who had visited her and usually stayed for about a week during the school vacation. But their apartment confined us to play inside because there wasn't a nice place to play outside. Now that she was older and could visit me we found interesting games to play together and enjoyed each other. When she left, I really missed her.

That summer passed by very quickly and I had to go back to school. This year I was going to attend the seventh grade in the newly built secondary Ten-Years-School Number 15.

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1. Anna Petrovna Boyko Ploscogolovaya, the second wife of Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy.
  2. Tatyana, the older sister of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky. See the chapter "Tatyana Gavriylovna Berezhnaya."
  3. Marianna Solomonovna Tatarskaya, daughter of Tatyana Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Tatarskaya.
  4. Anna, the younger sister of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky. See the chapter "Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya."
  5. See the chapter "Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria Outbreak."
  6. Maria Fyedorovna Dyeryughina Berezhnayaya. See the chapter "Ivan Gavriylovich Berezhnoy."
  7. Ivan, the younger brother of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky.
  8. Pyetr, the youngest brother of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky. See the chapter "Pyetr Gavriylovich Berezhnoy."
  9. Family photograph, 1937, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
  10. The former town of Yusovka that was renamed to Stalino by the Bolsheviks.

## The New Ten-Years-School In Slavyansk

By Olga Gladky Verro

On the first of September 1936 I was starting the seventh grade and was transferred to the newly built secondary school<sup>1</sup> that was known as the Ten-Years-School<sup>2</sup> Number 15. Although the school was planned for the increase in the number of pupils based on the estimated growth in the town population, when it was finally ready, there were not enough classrooms for all pupils enrolled in the seventh to tenth grades. Therefore, it was necessary to schedule classes in two shifts; the first shift was from half past seven o'clock in the morning until noon, and the second shift from one o'clock

to half past five in the afternoon.

I was glad that my class was scheduled in the second shift, because I had hard time getting up early in the morning after going to bed late at night. I usually did my homework after supper and then helped my mother correct her pupils' papers in Russian language, because my father could not help her anymore; he was working in the evening and at night as a proofreader in the local newspaper.<sup>3</sup>

On the first day of school I was on my way right after lunch at noon. The school was located quite far from Kalinin Street where we lived and, if I followed the streets I needed more than twenty-five minutes to walk. To reduce the time, I opted to take a shortcut through the opening in the high wooden fence that was commonly used by dwellers on our street. I easily pushed aside the couple of boards that were loosely held only on top of the fence cross-board and carefully squeezed myself through the opening. And voilà, I found myself in the large courtyard that was shared by several buildings. Now I had only to walk across the courtyard to come out on Gogol Street, which led straight to the school.

As I walked on the trampled down path, I saw a girl about my age that came out of the old one-story brick building. She hurriedly walked toward the path and waited there until I arrived. We looked at each other and at our school portfolios we carried and it became obvious to both of us that we were going to school.

The girl timidly asked me, "Are you going to the second shift in the new Ten-Years-School?"

I replied, "Yes. Are you enrolled there too? Then let's walk, because I don't want to be late the first day."

"Yes," she confirmed, "I am in the seventh grade."

"Ah!" I said with surprise, "I am in the seventh grade too. Maybe we will be in the same class."

"It's possible," replied the girl and added bashfully, "My name is Syma<sup>4</sup> Shyrman. What is your name?"

I replied, "Olga Gladkaya."<sup>5</sup>

It took us a good fifteen minutes to walk at a fast pace to reach the school. It was enough time for us to get acquainted a little with each other. I liked Syma right away because she didn't put on airs, was friendly, and somewhat shy.

The school was a big new three-story brick building built on the corner of the street and it had a large courtyard with only a few young trees planted far back near the low wooden fence. We followed the other students and entered the schoolyard where there was a side entrance door.

Syma asked me, "What is that long wooden structure over there?"

I recognized right away what it was—such structures were in every courtyard of the newly built buildings in the coalminer's hamlet of Kysyelyevka,<sup>6</sup> where I lived before—and said, "That's the communal latrine. Could you read the signs on both sides?"

"Yes," she answered and read, "Boys. Girls."

Suddenly our first impression about the new school became unpleasant. We were shocked by that unexpected sight of a wooden latrine erected over a deep pit in the schoolyard not far from the side entrance to the building. It stood there as a sore reminder of the Soviet accelerated construction shortcuts common in those days, when the installation of plumbing was left to be done sometime in the indefinite future.

Syma, who lived in the center of the old town, had never seen these big outhouses before, because the new buildings were built for the workers of the big factories located on the outskirts of the town. Instead, I was very familiar with that standard type of a latrine and explained to her about its internal details.

"Inside it is divided lengthwise in half by a wooden wall. On each side of that wall there is an elevated step with about a dozen round holes on the top board without any partitions for privacy."

Syma made a grimace and expressed her disgust, "Faugh!"

"You get used to it," I replied in a condescending way and asked her, "Could you imagine a race to run down and then back up the stairs to class to make on time in during the short recesses between lessons?"

She replied, "It depends on what floor our classroom is."

At the school office we found out that we indeed were in the same class and that our classroom was on the third floor in the wing of the building on the left side of the stairs. As we were climbing up the stairs, Syma told me, "You are right. It will be impossible for us to run to the courtyard the three flights of stairs during the short recesses. We could come down only during the main recess."

I added, "In case of emergency we could ask the teacher's permission to go down during the class."

"Not me, I would be ashamed to ask," Syma replied.

On the third floor we found our classroom. Some pupils were con-gregated in the hall and some were standing or sitting inside. The classroom had three large windows and there were three rows of pupils' desks; one row was placed against the wall with the windows, the other, in the middle, and the third, on the side where there was the door; a comfortable passage was left to the two bulletin boards on the wall. The teacher's desk was placed in front of the middle row; behind it was a long blackboard, and next to it close to the door was another bulletin board.

The pupils had already taken a few of the desks; some were sitting there and some had just placed their portfolios on the desk of their choice. Syma told me that she had to sit in front of the room because she couldn't see well and needed to be close to the blackboard. The second desk in the middle row was free and I agreed to sit with her there.

We looked around to find out if there was anyone that we knew from the sixth grade. Syma found some girls that she knew from the other school and told me their names, adding, "However, I didn't have much to do with them before. Then she gestured toward a skinny girl with child-like body and thin blond braids tied at the ends with small bows, "And that one is a loner." Then, without turning her head, she moved only her eyes in the direction of the three girls talking together. "Those are indivisible friends and they rarely associate with anyone else."

I saw Fimka Zusmanovich,<sup>7</sup> who was sitting toward the end of the third row, and told Syma that I had been with him in the same class in the fifth and sixth grade and I knew that he was from a Jewish family.

"My family is Jewish, too," said Syma, "but we don't know his parents."

Then I pointed to the door and said, "In the hall I saw Olga Krasnaya and some other girls who were in my sixth grade class. I really don't care about them because they belong to the same clique and they gossip a lot." However, neither of us knew most of

the other boys and girls.

After the bell, a very skinny teacher dressed in a loose and oversized knitted jacket of some indefinite drab color came in our classroom and presented herself. "My name is Anna Nikolayevna Shmulyevich. I will be head teacher of your class and will take the attendance every morning. If anyone of you will be absent or late to school, you need to bring a note from your parents."

Then she briefly described some of her other duties as a head teacher. "I will also distribute your report cards, assign you to the neighborhood brigades, and will help you publish the class wall-newspaper. From time to time I will place notices from the school administration on the bulletin board, and will take care of other class matters." And she advised us that, if we had questions, we should always ask her first before going to the school office. Then she told us some of the rules of the new school.

After she finished describing her duties as a head teacher she announced with pride, "I will also be your teacher of Russian language and literature." Finally, she told us to get up and form a column, beginning with those sitting on the desks closer to the door, and to follow her in an orderly manner for a tour of the new school.

On the third floor there were only classrooms similar to ours. On the second floor the classrooms were only in the two wings of the building, and there was a big hall that included the whole floor starting right from the stairs to the opposite wall with many large windows. The hall was used for physical and military education classes during bad weather and also in the winter when it could not be done outside in the schoolyard. The hall also served as an assembly hall with a small stage on the right side and piano standing in the corner near the window.

On the ground floor there were the school offices. The school director was standing near her office door and our head teacher introduced her to us very formally. "Pupils, meet comrade Malikova, the director of the new Ten-Years-School Number Fifteen."

"Good day, pupils!" greeted the director. "I hope that you are proud to be in the new school." And she made a sign to our head teacher to move along, because there was another class arriving to meet her. I was surprised that she was the same woman who was the director of the school I had attended last year. I told Syma, "I hope that she will not take revenge on me for last year's incident—she summoned my father to complain about me laughing during the physical education exercises in the school's courtyard. My father told her rather harshly that she unfairly singled me out for punishment when all pupils were laughing."<sup>8</sup>

In the wing of the ground floor there was a physical education exercise room equipped with a few standard items, such as parallel bars, a horse for gymnastic exercises in jumping and vaulting, and a multi-ladder grid fixed on the wall for climbing. In the same wing was a workshop equipped with workbenches and vises; there were shelves with basic woodworking and metalworking tools, such as files, planes, saws, drills, hammers, pliers, and screwdrivers.

I was surprised that there were no laboratories for physics or chemistry classes similar to the chemistry laboratory that my father had at the Rabfak in the hamlet of Kisyelyevka.<sup>9</sup> Also there was no cafeteria in the building. Our head teacher explained that we would not have a lunchtime recess, but only the fifteen-minute main recess—it would give us enough time to have a snack that we could eat in the classroom or in the

hall. We could either bring something from home, or could run down on the street corner to the small wooden kiosk to buy something there.

When we returned to the classroom, the head teacher told us that we would stay through the school day in our classroom and the teachers would come in for forty five minutes to teach their subjects; there would be a five-minute recess between the lessons and the main recess of fifteen minutes between the third and fourth lesson. She explained that all pupils had to take the same subjects according to the standard curriculum for grades seven through twelve as in all schools of the Soviet Union, which was mandated by the Central Commissariat of People's Education in Moscow. The textbooks in every subject were also standard, with the same content printed in Russian and then translated in all languages of the Soviet republics.

Syma and I didn't talk to anyone in our class and could not have an opinion about them. But during the recesses between classes we observed boys and girls and shared our impressions mostly about their appearance. We noticed that all girls were thirteen to fourteen years old and most were slender and of medium height, only a few were taller, or shorter than the others; some were physically more developed than the others and some still had a child-like figure, but all looked healthy. Most of the girls had braided hair, which was very popular at that time. Some girls had their hair parted in the center, some had it parted on one side, and some had it just combed back. Some had thin braids and others had thick braids; some had short and some had medium length braids; some tied the braids' ends with bows, and some had the braids put around the head like a crown with a big bow at the back covering their neck; and some just folded them at the back and secured them with the bows. Only a few girls had short hair.

Among the boys there was more variety of body-build and height. A few boys were very tall and well-built; several were shorter than the average, but well-proportioned overall. Behind us in a desk intended for two pupils, sat one big, fat and sluggish Jewish boy, Yasha Pevsner, whose name we learned right away because from the first day he behaved silly, clowning all the time. He was constantly reprimanded by the teachers.

On the first day we also met some of our teachers, who explained to us the program and distributed the textbooks for the subjects they would be teaching. The use of the textbooks was free for the duration of the course and we were advised to take good care of them, not to make any marks, because we had to return them at the end of the year for use by the next year students. We were advised that if we damaged or didn't return the textbooks, we would have to pay for them. Notebooks, pencils, erasers, and pens we had to purchase ourselves, but the inkwells were inserted in the hole on top of the desk. We had only to refill them with ink when needed.

After the lesson in mathematics the teacher Anna Filipovna Golovina gave us homework right away to be done for the next day. Syma became upset and confessed to me, "I hate mathematics! I always have a hard time solving the problems. And this teacher starts to give us the homework on the first day."

"But it is a very easy problem, it's a review of last year's material," I replied. "Do you want me to help you?"

Syma smiled and timidly asked, "Would you really help me? Do you want to stop at my apartment right after school before going home?"

"I think it will be better for me to come after supper," I replied. "My mother would

worry if I didn't come home right after school. We live so close to each other, and, if I take the shortcut through the fence, it will take me only a few minutes to walk."

We walked home together and shared our impressions about the first day of school. When we reached the big courtyard, Syma led me to the door of her apartment and said, "I will be waiting for you!"

"I will be there right after supper," I replied.

I was pleased to have found a nice girl of my age that lived close by and who could become my friend. I liked her right away and I felt that Syma also wanted me to be her girlfriend. I told my mother about my newly found friend and that we agreed to sit at the same desk and walk to and from school together.

I also explained that Syma hated mathematics and that I offered to help her with the homework that our teacher gave us.

After supper I went to Syma's apartment, where I met her mother, father, and older sister Fanya. All three of them were very, very fat and it was so strange for me to see that Syma was so skinny compared to the rest of her family. Her mother and father were much older than my parents. Her older sister had already graduated from the medical institute and was working as a doctor. But she was divorced, had a little son, and lived with her parents. Another sister was also studying somewhere in the medical institute.

Syma's mother began to question me about my family, but Syma didn't allow her to complete the inquiry and told her, "Don't worry, Lyalya is a nice girl from a good family. We have to do our homework in mathematics!" And she swiftly led me to the next room where she had her bed and a small table on which we could do our homework. I had to explain to Syma very patiently how to solve the problem, because she didn't have enough previous knowledge to be able to solve it.

After we finished our homework, Syma showed me the rest of their apartment that had three rooms leading into each other. The first one was a kitchen and all the family congregated there. From there the door led to the middle room, and from there to the third room. All the rooms were full of old, good quality furniture tightly packed together because there was not enough space. When we finished, Syma's mother treated us to some sweets and then Syma accompanied me to the fence. In saluting me, she said that tomorrow she would wait for me on the steps of her apartment and we would walk to school together.

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1. Additional recollections of former pupils: Maria Davidenko Pallotti, Serafima Shyrman, and Katherine Birula.

2. *Dyesyatilyetka* – school with grades seven to ten.

3. See the chapter "The Newspaper's Proofreader."

4. Nickname for Serafima.

5. Russian spelling of the feminine surname of Gladky.

6. See the chapter "Hamlet of Kisyelyevka."

7. See the chapter "My Preteen Years in Slavyansk."

8. See the chapter "My Preteen Years in Slavyansk."

9. See the chapter "Hamlet of Kisyelyevka."

# Teenager in Soviet School

By Olga Gladky Verro

On the second day of school<sup>1</sup> Anna Nikolayevna Shmulyevich, the head teacher of our seventh grade class,<sup>2</sup> assigned all pupils to the so-called pupils' brigades. It was something new that we didn't have in lower grades.

Anna Nikolayevna explained that members of each brigade were expected to be a team working together—they were responsible for helping each other study in all subjects and, if needed, helping with homework. In addition, the teammates had a duty to keep all teammates from falling behind in their studies. In case of the absence of one of them from school, they had to ask the teachers in all subjects to give them the homework for the absent pupil, then take it to the teammate's home, explain the assignments, and brief the student on the lessons taught that day. The teammates were also expected to make sure that nobody in their brigade was skipping, or was late to school and that all behaved well in class, in school, and after school. In short, everyone was responsible for all teammates in their brigade.

She asked the pupils to select their own teammates; those who were left alone she added to the brigades with pupils living in the same neighborhood, or more or less close to them. Of course, Syma and I selected each other; since we needed another teammate in our brigade a boy named Kostya<sup>3</sup> Syrota was added. He lived far from everybody—as far as the Shnurkovka School that I attended in the fifth grade and where my father had taught last year. Kostya was sitting all by himself at the last desk in the third row in the corner of the classroom near the wall.

On the large bulletin board, near the classroom entrance door, the teacher placed sheets of graph paper with the names of the pupils in each brigade; one of the team-mates was responsible for keeping the monthly score of the attendance, grades, and behavior for each teammate. At the end of the month the brigade that had more good grades, better attendance, and fewer behavior problems, was awarded the first place, followed by the brigades in second, third, fourth, and fifth places. Kostya volunteered to be the scorekeeper for our brigade and Syma and I were glad to delegate to him this task.

Kostya Syrota was a pleasant, agreeable teammate, and right from the beginning we established a good relationship among the three of us. He was an intelligent boy and had a straightforward character. Kostya and I found out that if there was any difficulty in homework we could help each other in school before the bell for the first class. He lived quite far from us and it was not necessary for him to do the homework with us, because I was taking care of helping Syma.

From then on, Syma and I would do our homework either in her home or mine. She really needed help in mathematics and I was glad to help her. It gave me a great sense of satisfaction to explain the concepts that were hard for her to grasp, and I had to lead her through the reasoning involved in solving the problems. I discovered that teaching her was very natural for me, probably as a result of having spent a lot of time in my father's and my mother's classrooms and from observing them teaching.

In the seventh grade Kostya had to come only once to my home, because I was

absent for several days with a bad cold, and Syma was not capable of explaining the lessons to me. When Kostya arrived, my father was home and to everybody's surprise they recognized each other. I found out that during the previous year he was in my father's biology class at the Shnurkovka School. And my father inadvertently called him by the last name Zaytsev. Kostya was quick in explaining to me that he changed his last name to his mother's name Syrota after his parents had divorced and he remained living with her. He said that this was the reason he decided to get transferred to the new school, where nobody knew him under his old name. Kostya asked me to keep his secret and not to tell anybody, not even Syma, about this. He told me also that my father was a very good teacher and he had high regard for him. And I felt that this episode reinforced his friendly rapport and respect for me.

By the time we were in the eight grade, the three of us felt comfortable together and could trust each other because neither Kostya, nor Syma, nor I, belonged to the exclusive cliques that were constantly involved in gossiping and in criticizing the other classmates. We didn't belong to the close groups, mostly all girls or all boys, who didn't associate much with the others either. But most of all, Kostya and I had many common interests and recognized that we intellectually challenged, but didn't compete, with each other in our studies.

Syma fell right away madly in love with Kostya. He didn't mind being admired by Syma, but he was not taking it seriously and she knew that he was not in love with her. But Kostya liked to innocently tease her about her tender feelings for him. During the recess he would come close to her, smile and say gently, "Hi, *Syelyedochka*."<sup>4</sup> And Syma's face would become red as a boiled crawfish and she would look around to see if anyone heard it. But notwithstanding her embarrassment, she was pleased to have his attention and didn't complain about it even to me.

During the school year we all three shared opinions about our classmates and teachers. Syma disagreed with our opinions, because she disliked the teachers of subjects that were hard for her to learn. But Kostya and I agreed in our evaluations, because we both liked mathematics and physics, and were enthusiastic about those subjects and admired our teachers. They were superb teachers and knew how to challenge students in their lessons.

Anna Filipovna Golovina, the teacher of mathematics, was an excellent teacher. She was able to teach algebra, geometry and trigonometry in such an appealing and interesting way that I could not help myself but stay alert and listen to her lessons. I was surprised at how easy it was for me to understand all the concepts she was teaching. But she was strict in checking our assignments and would not allow the pupils to neglect them.

I remember that once I was absent from school and she gave Syma the assignment for me, and I had to learn it from the textbook at home. But I didn't do it. When I returned to school, she called me to the blackboard right away to explain the geometrical theorem that I should have studied. So, I began to use the usual logic appropriate to support the theorem. I was going in circles writing the strings of equations, and somehow after filling the whole board with my writings was able to arrive at the same conclusion that could have been done with only a few lines. In the beginning Anna Filipovna looked at me with a stern face, perceiving that I didn't study the lesson, but she patiently allowed me to do it, obviously curious about how I would

solve the problem. Then, when finally I came to the end and had the right answer, she said in a deliberately strict manner, "You didn't study the lesson in the textbook, but I have to give you a credit for arriving at the right answer. Now watch the other pupil to show how it should be done in a much shorter way."

Another excellent teacher was Leonid Yudin, who was able to fascinate the pupils with physics. Since our school had no laboratory to enrich the lessons, the blackboard was the only place where he was able to demonstrate the phenomena by drawing the whole experiment step-by-step, sometimes filling the whole space with the pictures and formulas to be learned.

He was a very young man with a full head of rusty-red hair and an open and expressive face. He possessed a magnetic personality that appealed to the teenagers, both boys and girls, and he was full of enthusiasm for the subject he was teaching.

Kostya and I loved his lessons, because he was able to teach them in a very interesting way and entice the curiosity of his pupils. He was always friendly and had an almost comradely way of talking to the pupils; at the same time he was demanding us to learn his subject and had a special way of rewarding us with words for work well done and for the right answers to his questions. But Syma was not very fond of him because physics was very hard for her to understand and I had to help her in this subject too.

Everybody loved the teacher of German language, Emma Ferdinandovna. She was a very sweet and pleasant young woman and had a gentle and patient way of teaching without being strict. Most of the pupils tried hard to do their best just to please her. She was tall, very pretty, and was always dressed simply, but elegantly, and the girls admired her for that.

Anna Nikolayevna Shmulyevich was also a good teacher of Russian language and literature. She was very skinny and didn't pay any attention to her appearance. She was always dressed in loose, drab clothing and unmatched colors. Her bigger problem was that she was rather nervous and had little patience with the pupils. For some unknown reason pupils misnamed her and it became common to call her—of course behind her back—*Klizmochka*, which means "the little enema." Sometimes her lessons didn't appeal to me, because she was demanding that I learn the grammar rules, which I felt I didn't need to learn, because I always wrote very well without mistakes.

Once she admonished me for my lack of effort in this and told me, "I am surprised that you write so remarkably correct in Russian, but you don't know many of the grammar rules."

I answered her, "I have corrected so many students' dictation papers for my mother's Russian classes that I know spelling and punctuation by heart. And if I am writing grammatically without errors, why should I learn the rules? I am not planning to be a teacher of Russian language."

She replied, "Knowing the grammar would help you in learning foreign languages." And she was correct—I had to learn the grammar rules that were needed in studying German.

The chemistry teacher was the director of our school, Comrade Malikova. She was an authoritarian in teaching and in her treatment of the pupils and I couldn't stand her for this. We had to endure her long writings of the formulas on the blackboard that we had to copy in our notebooks and memorize. I didn't have difficulty learning

inorganic chemistry, as some of the others did. I had the advantage of being familiar with many facets of chemistry from my father's classes and laboratory at the Rabfak in Kisyelyevka and was familiar with the Mendeleev's Periodic Table of Elements. But for many pupils, including my friend Syma, it was like a Chinese language and I had to coach her in that subject too.

The teacher of Ukrainian language and literature was not too strict and he put much emphasis on literature and Ukrainian history. I liked to listen to his expressive readings in class of poetry by one of the best Ukrainian poets, Taras Shevchenko.

For some reason, we also studied in Ukrainian some of the classic Greek literature, such as Homer's "Iliad," but I couldn't savor it in Ukrainian translation, it sounded very strange.

The history teacher was very boring. He assigned to read at home the chapters from the history textbook ahead of time and then discussed them in class. He was always making sure that we didn't deviate from the ideas and words as they were written in the textbook and constantly reminded us to look back in the textbook for the right answer.

He was especially strict in enforcing this when we studied the pre-revolutionary history of Russia, where the textbook emphasized the exploitation of the poor by the rich—the peasants by the landowners. He was very particular in demanding the "right answers" when we studied the events of the Russian revolution, where the textbook was proclaiming the Bolsheviks' victory over the many "enemies of the working class," such as old czarist regime, landowners, capitalists, and the White Army. It seems that the teacher was afraid to introduce any idea that was not included in the textbook for fear of not being politically correct, and the safe way for him was to follow the text that was dictated by the Central Commissariat Of People's Education in Moscow.

The geography teacher also taught geology and astronomy, subjects that he was able to present with maps and drawings. He had the ability to present the material in a way that interested the pupils. I became involved to such a degree that I began to consider becoming a geologist or an astronomer. I used to observe the sky at night and learned to recognize some constellations and the major stars.

The biology teacher also relied strongly on the textbook for its illustrations and there was a lot of memorizing involved, but I had several books on this subject in my father's collection and was supplementing what I learned in class with my readings; the teacher was pleased with my performance.

Then there were physical education and military training teachers, and the workshop teacher. All these subjects being non-academic gave us some relaxation and time away from the classroom that all pupils were glad to have.

In physical education we did mostly gymnastic exercises with the whole group and some training on the equipment. For the non-athletically inclined students there was not much emphasis on perfection in performance, and only those who were interested were allowed extra practice on the equipment. We were not evaluated with grades in this subject and only our attendance was required to have "passed" the course.

The military training included learning to use gas masks and marching in the courtyard, learning the commands, and listening to some pep talks about the virtues of defending the Motherland from capitalist aggression and about military service duty.

I liked the workshop, where we worked on simple tasks, mostly to learn how to use the various tools available there. We never worked on complete projects that required long periods of time—there were neither the supplies nor the time allotted to work on them. We usually were given simple assignments such as making wooden or metal shapes, drilling holes, planing, filing, using a screwdriver attaching screws, a hammer nailing pieces together, or a saw cutting wooden shapes. Although attendance at workshop was compulsory, we were not evaluated with grades—just “passed” the course.

The art teacher was mostly interested in teaching us how to use drafting tools and introduced us to the three-dimensional design of geometric shapes and sketching, rather than drawing pictures or learning art principles and colors.

There were obligatory assemblies in the big hall to celebrate all communists’ commemorative days such as, The International Workers Solidarity Day—May 1st; The October Revolution Day—November 7th; The International Woman’s Day—March 8th; The Red Army Day—February 23rd; and some other minor Bolsheviks’ victories days. Usually, the pupils had to listen to the speeches full of slogans proclaiming the virtues of the Communist-Bolshevik Party and concluded with the adulation of the party and its leader: “Long live the Communist Party!” “Long live our great leader and our dear Father Stalin!”

Then there was a New Year’s celebration with the traditional decorated pine tree and Grandfather Frost<sup>5</sup> distributing gifts, all concepts borrowed by the communists from the old religious holiday of Christmas that was abolished as all other Christian holidays.

But clandestinely many families were celebrating both Christmas and Easter, as did my grandfather and grandmother, who continued with the tradition and invited my parents and me to share those holidays with them. We were very careful not to make it known to anybody that we were going there. As an educator, my mother was expected to teach her pupils the evils of religion and the communist doctrine slogan: “Religion is the opiate of the people.” Therefore, celebrating these holidays could have meant her dismissal from the school. To be sure that I didn’t inadvertently tell something to someone about religion, my mother was not teaching me anything about the religious meanings of these holidays. She simply explained that these were the old-fashioned traditional holidays which for my very religious grandfather were very important to celebrate and that we should not disappoint him by not accepting his invitations. But I was always happy to be invited because I liked the special food and the sweets prepared by my grandmother. However, I learned that these celebrations were like a big family secret about which I should not talk with anyone.

It was during the 1937-38 school year that I began to have difficulty seeing what was written on the blackboard, and my mother insisted on taking me to the eye doctor, who prescribed eyeglasses for me. At that time it was considered a handicap for a young girl to wear glasses and I had to endure being called “four-eyed” by the malicious boys from the other classes in school. But the boys in our class didn’t bother me. On the contrary, Kostya told me that the eyeglasses made me look very distinguished, and the opinion of a boy who was my friend and who was always sincere with me made me feel good right away, so I was not ashamed to wear them.

In our class were two cousins, Musya<sup>6</sup> Davidenko and Lyena<sup>7</sup> Tarasenko, who sat

together in the first row next to the windows. They lived on the side of town beyond the big bazaar square in the homes their parents built next to each other. Everybody considered them to be inseparable because they also walked to and from school together.

Musya was very pretty, with a gentle round face, small well-shaped mouth and nose, puffy rosy cheeks, and the smiling brown eyes. She had light chestnut-brown hair parted on one side and braids placed around her head. She had a very vivacious and pleasant personality and was always friendly with everybody, but it was obvious that her cousin Lyena influenced her a lot.

Lyena didn't resemble her cousin Musya at all, although she was pretty in her own way. She had an oval face with prominent cheekbones and fair complexion. Her big blue eyes were remarkably clear but were cold as the two icicles. Her wheat-blond hair was parted in the middle and plaited in two thick braids that she wore hanging down. Lyena was always very serious and looked at others with a calm indifference that didn't promote confidence with the other pupils, girls or boys.

Both Musya and Lyena were very good students in all subjects but, while Musya was modest about her intelligence and excellent grades, Lyena was always giving herself big importance about being smart.

It was in the eight grade that one very strange case happened in our class. There was a girl by the name of Sasha<sup>8</sup> who was sitting in the middle row a few desks from the front of the room. Sasha was tall, healthy, with a somewhat athletic body build. She combed her blond hair smoothly toward the back and plaited it in one single long, thick braid that resembled a snake that slid along her back or shoulders with each movement of her head. Her large blue eyes were proportioned to her oblong face with the strongly prominent cheekbones and were complemented by her fair complexion. She was a good student in Russian and Ukrainian Literature and wrote poetry for various occasions to be included in our class wall newspaper.

Some time toward the end of the school year, Sasha suddenly began to write poetry about her love for Musya. She was prolific in her writing and every day presented one new poem, desperately trying to gain Musya's affection. Musya was embarrassed to be the object of such admiration and tried to discourage Sasha, who responded with a new wave of poetry. Sasha became more aggressive and was not at all careful in hiding her admiration for Musya from the other pupils in the class—very quickly it became well known to everybody. The rumors began to spread that Sasha was half-girl and half-boy and someone invented a short song with an easy tune that began with such words as: "Akh, Sashka is a boy..." and this placed her in a very awkward situation. She avoided talking with anyone in class and barely finished the final exams.

At the end of the school year after the eighth grade she immediately left town. The rumors were that she had moved to Moscow, cut short her beautiful hair, had a male haircut, dressed herself in male clothing and enrolled there in a Technicum<sup>9</sup> as a boy.

This incident with Sasha was an introduction for our pupils to the aberrations of nature and to one of the mysteries of sex. Syma and I exchanged what we heard from the others on this subject, but it was too embarrassing to discuss it with Kostya and we avoided conversation with him at that time.

During the school vacation in the summer Syma and I took Vyetka to Slavyansk

Kurort to splash in the Salty Lake and to sunbathe on the sandy beach, except for those days that I was scheduled for the mud therapy for my face that I was taking every summer.<sup>10</sup> On some evenings we went to the Soborny Square, that now was called Lenin's Square, to see a movie in the former church building that had been transformed to a club soon after the Soviet authorities came to power and now remodeled as a movie theater. We liked to see the American comic movies with Charlie Chaplin or with Stanley and Ollie, the only foreign films that were shown in the Soviet Union at that time.

On some evenings we would just sit on the steps to Syma's apartment and sing. Although neither Syma nor I had good voices and both were tone deaf, we both enjoyed singing mostly the old, sad Russian or Ukrainian folk songs, such as: "*Troyka*,"<sup>11</sup> "*Volga, Volga*,"<sup>12</sup> "*Ekh, Ukhnyem*,"<sup>13</sup> "*The High Mountain*,"<sup>14</sup> "*Boys, Unharness the Horses*,"<sup>15</sup> "*Oy, Chubchyky Da Nye Kuchery*,"<sup>16</sup> the easy and lively "*Kalinka-Malinka*," and "*Polyushko-polye*." We liked also to sing the song from the movie "*The Children of Captain Grant*"<sup>17</sup> that had the first words "Captain, Captain, smile please, because the smile is the flag of the ship..." The Soviet patriotic songs made only a small part of our repertoire and we rarely sang them. For some reason they did not appeal to us neither with their words, nor with their melodies.

In 1938 my aunt Nyusya wrote to my mother that there was in Kharkov a very well known neurologist who was performing nerve transplants and she suggested that we come for a consultation to find out if he could improve nerve function on the left side of my face. She agreed to make an appointment during the summer school vacations. Thus, my mother and I traveled to Kharkov. My mother also wanted to visit her sister, who had a vacation after one of the expeditions of the medical team in the Asian part of the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup>

The doctor took the history of my facial paralysis and examined me very carefully. He found that I had recovered from the Bell's palsy very well and that all the cures that my parents tried through the years were very effective. He said that the nerve transplant at that time was only an experimental procedure that could have unpredictable results, and with the progress I had already made it was not advisable. He suggested continuing with the hot mud therapy that had such beneficial effect on some of the nerves controlling the mouth muscles, which, in his opinion, might improve even more with time. But the nerve that controlled the left eyebrow probably could not regain its functions. His advice was to keep ourselves informed on the progress that the nerve transplant operations would have in the future and if it would eventually become a successful procedure, to come and see him or any other neurologist at that time.

While we were in Kharkov, we went to the store that was commonly called *Lux Magazine*. Such types of stores were found only in some major cities of the Soviet Union. There, at the very inflated prices compared to those in the common government stores, one could find all kind of merchandise. At that time I needed shoes for the fall and we were not able to find them in our town stores. Here we found a very nice pair of black shoes, but when I tried them they were very narrow for my feet, but still I could put them on and make a few steps. The store didn't have another pair that would fit me better, and we decided that maybe they would stretch by wearing them. Regrettably, even the shoe repairman was not able to stretch them and I suffered the whole season wearing them.

During the years of 1938 and 1939 many events had occurred in our life at home

and in my life in school. These events influenced the changes in our family and in school, as well as in my relationship with my friends.

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1. Additional recollections of former pupils: Maria Davidenko Pallotti, Serafima Shyrman, and Katherine Birula.
2. See the chapter "The Ten-Years-School in Slavyansk."
3. Nickname for Konstantin.
4. The mocking nickname "a Little Herring" that somebody gave to Syma, because she was very skinny.
5. Dyed Moroz.
6. Nickname for Maria.
7. Nickname for Yelena.
8. Nickname for Alexandra.
9. Students were admitted to Technicum after completing the eighth grade.
10. See the chapter "Return to My Hometown of Slavyansk."
11. Russian folk song that begins with the words "*Odnovuchno zvyenit kolokolchik...*"
12. Russian folk song about folk hero Yemelyan Pugachev.
13. A song about the peasants pulling the barge on the River Volga.
14. Ukrainian folk song that begins with the words "*Stoit gora vysokaya...*"
15. Ukrainian folk song that begins with the words "*Raspryahaite khlopzy koney...*"
16. Humorous Ukrainian song about the girl who has hard time to select a boy by his hairdo.
17. A song from the movie based on the story from the book "Captain Grant" by Jules Verne.
18. See the chapters "Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria Outbreak" and "Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya."

## A Fight For Our Garden

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

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During the years of 1937-1939 the Communist Bolshevik Party was preoccupied with its internal struggle for power and its domination over the country<sup>1</sup>. There were endless purges of the party members, of the Soviet apparatus bureaucracy, and of the military higher rank commanders. But everything belonged to the state and everybody was working in the government-owned factories, offices, schools, and other state enterprises. Therefore, the terror persisted in enveloping the life of ordinary people and nobody could see the end of it. The arrests were continuing and thousands of innocent lives were perishing in the prisons and concentration camps called *contslagers*.

The ordinary people became completely estranged from politics; in fact, the more neutral and detached they were from the Bolsheviks and their party activities, the safer they felt. And probably they were. The population at large was constantly adapting to the ever-changing rules and new regulations or requirements that were forced on them by the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government.

With great efforts and patience the ordinary people were trying to overcome all the difficulties and obstacles impeding their lives. Apprehensively watching every step, they were bustling and swarming like ants, pushing their lives forward, infusing themselves into a common flow of human existence. The normal course of the lives of

the common mortals not belonging to the party and Soviet bureaucracy elite was to carry on an everyday struggle for their existence. And although each person had to deal with his own individual needs, interests, desires and passions, the overwhelming priority in everyone's life was the same.

They had to concentrate all their efforts on the best way of earning their living or managing their scarce resources; on finding where to buy food and clothing, which were constantly in short supply; and on bringing up and educating their children with high standards of morality and aspirations. Everyone wanted to make his or her life better and more comfortable. Families had dreams and were making sacrifices to buy or to build their own modest homes. Some were lucky to find already existing private houses that were available for sale; the others were contriving to build themselves a house on a small piece of land where they could grow vegetables or cultivate fruit garden.

After many years of constantly moving from one place to another our family finally settled in Slavyansk,<sup>2</sup> where it appeared that my husband had found an ideal place of employment where nobody was inquiring about his past.<sup>3</sup> Now my husband and I could allow ourselves to have a dream of having our own place to live. We decided to buy a house in my name for reasons of security. It would not likely be confiscated if my husband was again investigated or arrested for his secretly guarded past of having been a volunteer in the White Army. We started to save money for the house and, when we saved enough we began to look for a place to buy that would have land for cultivating vegetable and fruit gardens.

In August of 1938 we were fortunate to find such a place not far from where my husband was employed. It was located on Number 86 Yunykh Komunarov<sup>4</sup> Street, a few houses beyond the printing house on the corner of Kharkovsky Street. It was a very small outbuilding situated inside the courtyard and in the back of a larger brick house owned by a widow, Maria Nikolayevna Ivanova, who was selling it.

In the pre-revolutionary times this small outbuilding with outside dimensions of 53 square meters was used as a kitchen and living quarters for the servants. It was a sturdy structure made of thick wood logs covered with clay and painted in whitewash. The roof was covered with zincified iron sheet painted over with several layers of roof paint. It had two small double frame windows in each room, and for ventilation one of them had a tiny hinged windowpane called *fortochka*.

The house was divided in half by a hollow wall that incorporated a chimney connected on the side of the kitchen to a big brick stove with an oven for cooking meals, and next to it was a brick baking oven. In the other room on the wall, high above the baking oven, was a hollow opening called "over-the-stove," which in the old peasants' cottages was used as a warm sleeping chamber, but we thought it would be a nice storage space.

On one side of the house there was a wooden porch, part of which was enclosed and served as an entrance hall to the kitchen. Inside the porch all around the walls were shelves for storage, and there was a space for a huge wooden barrel to store water, which had to be brought in with buckets from a draw-well located across the railroad tracks a few houses down on the other side of the street. In the ceiling of the porch there was a trap door, through which one could climb on a ladder to the storage space in the attic that had a finished clay floor.

The rest of the porch was not enclosed and was surrounded by lilac bushes, and

a cherry tree was growing very close to the corner of the house. Across the path from the porch there was a detached wooden summer kitchen that had a brick stove with an oven. And on the other side of the house there was a separate entrance with the steep steps leading under the house into a deep large and cool cellar for storage and preservation of food, produce, and other perishable provisions.

In front, and on the side of the house there were 350 square meters of a courtyard with thick growth of raspberry bushes all along the brick wall of the neighboring schoolhouse. In the back of the house there were 937 square meters of a vegetable garden; at one end was an outhouse, and on the other end there was a long wood shed for storing wood and coal and for housing chickens. The shed was divided in half with 47 square meters each that we shared with the widow.

All this was fenced on all sides with a gate leading to the other part of that property, a 2,473 square meters<sup>5</sup> of a fruit garden, which was in a neglected state, full of tall weeds. From the words of the widow who owned it, the care of the garden had stopped when her husband died about ten years ago. Seeing such a large garden we wondered how she was able to keep it from being taken by the state. She said that the local government had never expressed any interest in that garden, although part of it was right in back of the elementary school. Probably being in such a neglected and wild state it didn't attract the attention of the Soviet or party bosses.

For this property Ivanova was asking five thousand rubles. We consulted with my father to see if it was worth that much and asked him if he could help us with some cash because we didn't have the whole amount. My father approved our purchase and gave us a loan that we promised to repay promptly.

On August 23, 1938 we made an agreement<sup>6</sup> to purchase the property from Maria Nikolayevna Ivanova for five thousand rubles and paid her in cash at the signing of the Sale and Purchase Agreement in the presence of a notary, and we paid a state tax of thirty-five rubles at the time of the transaction.

It was one of the happiest days for our family when we moved from the apartment on Kalinin Street to our own house. As soon as we settled down inside the house, all three of us, my husband, I, and our fifteen-years-old daughter, started immediately, and with great enthusiasm, clearing the fruit garden. We hoped to finish the work before the winter.

Crawling on our knees we pulled high weeds out with our bare hands, trying to get as much of the roots as we could. Then we dug up the whole garden to break up the hard surface soil and to destroy weeds by removing the rest of the deep roots. My husband trimmed all old dry branches from the trees and brushed all the trunks with slack lime to kill the insects. And at the end we cleared up the old paths between the tree rows. Even without the leaves, which had fallen in the autumn, the garden looked clean and neat as a well cared for garden should look at that time of the year. After all our efforts to bring this garden into a cultivated state, we had great hope in our hearts and minds that our dreams of having a beautiful garden would come true in the spring.

Indeed, our labors were not lost. The spring arrived and all the trees were blooming. One could not recognize the old garden. It was a pleasure to come home after a full day of work and to enjoy the evening in our own beautiful garden among the flowering and sweet-smelling fruit trees. The aroma emanating from the blooming cherry, apple, pear, apricot and plum trees filled the air during the entire spring season

since the trees did not all flower at the same time. And all the petals falling from the flowers covered the garden grounds with a soft pale-pink and white carpet. We felt when we were in our garden that we were in our own private paradise. Being there, we forgot the gloomy reality of our existence, which kept us in constant tension. Indeed in our garden we were able to relax for a while and really forget everything in the world.

But our rejoicing was short-lived. We were not aware when we purchased the property that the older children from the nearby orphanage had poor supervision and were free to roam the backyards in a large area of the neighborhood. The flowering trees immediately attracted their attention and they attacked our garden by climbing the trees and breaking the flowering branches. The widow, who sold us the property and who lived in the big house facing the street, told us that this was the work of the orphans.

Things got worse when the fruits started to appear on the trees. The vandals were stripping the green unripe fruit, giving it a bite or two and throwing it on the ground. Then in a rage that they could not eat the bitter fruit, they would punish the innocent trees by breaking the branches and scattering them around the garden. Every afternoon on our return home from school and work we would find several of our beautiful trees mangled by the young vandals. It was impossible to catch them and to report them to their supervisors because they carefully selected times when we were not home. Without proof there was no way we could accuse them. In desperation I complained to the Town's *Milistia*, but there they answered me with a sneer: "We do not guard the private gardens!"

Well, my husband decided that it was not too late to save the garden, we would build a high fence all around to protect it. We found a retired bricklayer who promised us to work fast together with his sons to complete the fence before the fruit started to ripen. To deter the vandals, he proposed the right height of the brick wall, and to discourage them climbing over the fence he suggested incorporating pieces of broken glass bottles on the top, to which my husband agreed. The bricklayers worked in shifts from very early in the morning until dark, with the sons getting there after their full day's work elsewhere.

Because during most of the summer the men were working around the garden all day, the vandals couldn't do much damage to the trees, and we had a good harvest in the fall. All three of us had worked hard throughout the summer taking care of both fruit and vegetable gardens and were very busy in the fall harvesting the fruits of our labor. We made lots of jars of all kinds of fruit preserves, dried fruits in the sun, and filled the cellar and the attic with crates full of apples and pears neatly stored for the winter. And in the house under the tables and beds were stored big pumpkins and some kind of hard pears that required a warm place to ripen slowly in the winter.

We also had a good harvest of potatoes that we stored in the big wooden crate—enough for the whole winter. We collected enough corn to feed our chickens through the next harvest and several bags of sunflower seeds to make our own sunflower oil and to eat roasted seeds in the winter. We pickled our cucumbers, tomatoes, and cabbage in the wood barrels placed in the cellar. And we filled our cellar with cabbage heads, beets, and carrots. In addition we sold the produce to our friends, neighbors, and acquaintances.

But the beauty of the garden in the spring, the building of the brick fence, and the

abundance of the harvest didn't escape the attention of the Communist Party vigilantes. The first one who noticed our garden was Comrade Oksanchenko, the censor of the local newspaper where my husband was working as a proofreader. He asked my husband several times to sell him a portion of the garden. Because we didn't want even to hear about it, he tried to scare us by telling that we would hardly be able to keep it and use it for a long time, since it was too big for private ownership. But I told him that this garden has been in private use for many years and there was no reason why it should suddenly be taken from us. After this, he stopped bothering us.

It was well known that after the revolution all land was nationalized. Individuals were allowed the ownership of the single family houses costing not more than a certain amount, but they could not own the land on which the house and other auxiliary structures stood, or the land adjacent to the house that was used by the owners to cultivate fruit and vegetable gardens. For the use of land all were required to pay rent to the government. We also knew that there were certain restrictions on the amount of land that individuals were allowed to cultivate. When we were buying the house and the garden, we assumed that, since it had for twenty years not been taken from others who cultivated it, or from Maria Nikolayevna, who did not cultivate it, it meant that it was a legal size garden.

In the summer of 1939 I was summoned to the office of Comrade Byelokonye, the head of the Department of Popular Education of the Town of Slavyansk. When I entered his office he blatantly announced, "We are requesting that you give up your garden for use by the Elementary School Number 6." When I started to protest against such an unjust order Comrade Byelokonye categorically stated, "The land belongs to the state and we are in charge."

"No, you cannot take it from us," I continued to protest. "I, with all my family, worked very hard to put that garden in an orderly condition, to make out of the wild growth a beautiful and cultivated fruit garden. Why didn't you take it before when it was wild and neglected?"

"It doesn't matter, we can request it at any time. The land belongs to the state," he repeated over and over the same words.

"And how about the trees?" I asked him. "I paid for them when I bought the house and the garden. And how about the brick fence that we just built around the garden to protect it from vandals?"

To this he answered cynically, "You may remove your trees and your fence and take them with you."

I left the office telling him defiantly, "I will never give up my garden!"

The back of the Elementary School Number 6 had a garden lot that bordered our fruit garden. To the shame of Comrade Byelokonye, who lived in another building in the courtyard of the same school, the school garden was in the same neglected state ours was before we cleaned it up. Because of its wild state, the pupils were not allowed to use it.

"Damn him, impudent Communist!" I exploded angrily, recounting my encounter with Byelokonye to my husband. "Now that we have put this garden in order, he wants it for himself to enjoy in the evenings and to harvest the fruits in the fall. Do you seriously believe that he will ever allow the pupils to play in the garden?"

"Of course, not," replied my husband, "but what can we do? You cannot fight the

communist boss. If you start the fight, he will find a way to hush you up. Or even worst, he would start to investigate you and me and we would have to run again to another town."

"No!" I replied stubbornly. "I will fight for my garden! I will fight!"

The interesting part of this whole story was that the principal of the Elementary School Number 6 was Katya Grudzinsky,<sup>7</sup> my first cousin on my mother's side, a daughter of my uncle Fedya.

She lived in the same house in the apartment next to Byelokonye. When I went to see her and asked about who was behind all of this sudden decision of annexing my garden to the school garden, she didn't know anything about it. She was as surprised as I was and swore to me that Byelokonye had never asked her opinion about the need of adding another piece to the school garden.

"Dear *Tonyechka*," my cousin told me sincerely, "what will I do with the additional garden when we don't use the one we already have? They don't give me people to clean up that wilderness, which is full of debris from being neglected from the revolution time. I stopped to asking about it, long time before Byelokonye became my boss. And in the condition that land is in now, I cannot allow my pupils to go and play there; it is not safe." Then she added, "Please don't mention what I told you to anybody. Don't get me in trouble. I could lose my position if they found out that I talked to you. I think that until this matter is resolved, it will be better that we don't see each other... And for God's sake, don't tell anyone that we are cousins! But I wanted you to know that I have nothing to do with it."

My family continued to persuade me not to quarrel with the authorities, because they were afraid that I could be arrested for putting up a resistance to the orders of the Soviet and communist authority. My husband insisted that I stop this nonsense, because he was convinced that, if I continued, the authorities would definitely start to investigate his White Army past.

All my friends and many people in town knew all about what was happening and were closely following how my fight would end. Many were shaking their heads and telling me, "Spit on that garden! It's not worth it! You are asking to be put away in prison or even to be sent to Siberia!" But I was unshaken by all these predictions of gloom and was not giving up. One of the reasons for my tenacity was that I couldn't understand why the local authorities were trying to make me give up my garden voluntarily. Why didn't they just take it over by force? What was preventing them from doing it?

But they were not giving up the fight either; indeed it began to flare up. Several commissions came to see our garden, its location and size. One time the Chief Of the Town's Militia came and was astonished by the beauty and the size of the garden. He made a caustic remark, "What kind of rich landowners are living here right in the center of the town? How can such things happen in the twentieth year after the revolution?"

I answered him, "Comrade *Militsionyer*,<sup>8</sup> people here work hard with their own hands to make this garden cultivated and productive."

Then one day two men came from the Provincial Department Of the Agriculture. They inspected the conditions of the trees and measured our garden. While one of them was writing their report the other came to talk with me. He asked, "Who is working in your garden?"

I answered, "The three of us, my husband, I, and our daughter."

"You don't hire anybody to help you?"

"No. We don't need any help, we do it all ourselves."

"Well, in your case you should not give up your garden."

I looked at him with disbelief. And he added, "Listen care fully and don't tell anybody that I told you this. The law of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which was passed on February 17, 1927, allowed the citizens owning a house in the towns to have up to 1,820 square meters of the adjacent land, which they could use as a courtyard and for vegetable and fruit gardens. There is a new provision for the cultivated gardens adjacent to the houses if the owners themselves cultivate them. The new provision states that, unless the land is kept unproductive, the government cannot confiscate the cultivated gardens of reasonable size and cannot take them without the permission of the property owner. In order to take it from you, the government would need your consent. In our report it will be stated that your garden is up to the highest standards required for the cultivated garden."

I could not believe that such good persons were still living in this God-forsaken country. "How can I thank you for your advice?" I asked him with humility.

"There is no need for it. I am an agriculturist not a politician. My concern is for the garden that you keep in such good care. I do not want to see it becoming abandoned as the school garden next to yours is."

Later I found out that this exception to the law was made for the purpose of encouraging the production of fruits and vegetables for the market, which was not sufficiently supplied with produce by the collective and state-owned farms. To learn about this new provision to the law soon became very important for me. Knowing that a cultivated garden cannot be requisitioned from me without my consent, I decided that I would never give it up without a fight.

Since I was not giving up my garden voluntarily to the town government, the case was transferred to the Provincial Executive Committee of the Soviet Delegates From Workers, Peasants, and Red Army Men located in the town of Stalino. I was summoned to appear before the Presidium of the Provincial Executive Committee, where I had to undergo the inquiry regarding my insubordination to the decisions of the Town Soviet authorities.

On the seventh of July, 1939 I arrived at the building of the Provincial Soviet, where I was escorted to the balcony at the end of a huge hall full of the Provincial Soviet Delegates whom we, the voters, supposedly had elected to represent us and to defend our interests. I was left there standing alone and was submitted to questioning by members of the Executive Committee who were sitting at the podium and by the delegates sitting in the hall.

I had to answer numerous and preposterous questions, which had nothing to do with my case:

"Who was your father before the revolution?"

"Where he is now?"

"Why was the house purchased in your name and not in your husband's name?"

"Where is your husband employed?"

"How did you manage to have the money to buy a house?"

"Why have you built a brick fence around the garden?"

"Why did you build such a high fence around your garden?"

"Why have you put broken glass on the top of the fence?"

"Were you not concerned that the children could cut themselves climbing over the fence?"

The elected Provincial Soviet delegates assaulted me like birds of prey with their accusations and, pointing their fingers at me, they were all repeating the same things but in different ways: "The land belongs to the state!" "You have no rights to the land!"

Not even one voice was heard saying something in my defense or in the defense of the new provision of the law protecting the cultivated gardens. All of the delegates were trying either to convince me to voluntarily give up my garden to the state, or trying to scare me with their questions.

Then somebody suggested a compromise, they asked me if I would agree to give up voluntarily the larger part of the garden adjacent to the school and keep the smaller part of it, which is adjacent to my courtyard. I answered, "No, I would not." All this time I had only to answer their questions. I was not given the opportunity to defend my case or to bring the attention of the delegates to the existing Law, which I was prepared to mention as a defense for my decision.

At the end of the inquiry the Chairman of the Executive Committee asked me if I was ready to agree to give up my garden to the state voluntarily. But I was firm with my decision and answered without hesitation, "No! I am not giving up my garden. I will never give up my dream!"

The chairman announced laconically, "The inquiry is closed. You shall receive our written resolution to confiscate your garden in favor of the school. You may go." With those words I was dismissed.

The conduct of the inquiry and the resolution of the case didn't satisfy me and I left the Assembly of the Provincial Soviet Delegates with a bitter resentment of injustice. On my way home on the train I started to plan my next move to vindicate my garden. "After all, I thought, the law is on my side and I have only to find the right place or maybe the right person who can help me to uphold that law. Yes, the right person! Of course, I know the right person and he is a very important person in the Ukraine". By the time I arrived home I had already decided to write a letter to my former student Nikita Khrushchev, who at that time was already the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic and the Candidate of the Central Politburo of the Communist Party.

In the last week of July I received a notice from the office of the Seven-Year-School Number 3 where I worked. They notified me that they had received an important letter for me from the Office of the Town Soviet. I knew immediately that it would be a copy of the official document, and rushed to the school office. Indeed, it was a Resolution of the Presidium of Stalino's Provincial Executive Committee<sup>9</sup> about the detachment of land from our garden and I hurried home to read it with my husband.

We studied the resolution carefully; the provincial authorities concluded that, according to the norm established by the U.S.S.R. Government, the gardens in use by the citizens in towns cannot exceed 1,820 square meters and, therefore, ordered the Slavyansk Town's Soviet to expropriate about half of our garden, or exactly 1,656 square meters, and allocate it to the School No.6. This was much less than Byelokonye expected to get, but it was also not what I was willing to give him. In addition, the Town's Soviet was ordered to compensate us for the portion of the fence that was

adjacent to the expropriated portion of the garden according to the governmental prices, which meant much less than what we paid for it. Of course, I was not satisfied. But my husband was almost relieved that maybe the problem would end and there would not be any revenge by the Byelokonye and no inquiries into his past. He urged me to compromise and not pursue my quest for justice.

But now that I had in my possession a copy of the official document, in which I was informed by the Stalino's Provincial Executive Committee that a portion of my garden would be taken from me, I could proceed with my next move. I made the copy of this "Resolution" that I had just received. Then I wrote a letter to my former student. In my letter to Nikita Khrushchev I explained all the details of my case including the mock inquiry in Stalino and mentioned the new provision to the old law regarding the cultivated gardens. I also reminded him that once I was his teacher, but now I was asking him to be my teacher, because he was more knowledgeable than I was about the laws and that he could give me an advice about what I had to do in my case. In conclusion I asked him to help me solve my case with fairness and according to the law of the land and, if necessary, to punish the guilty ones, no matter who they were, myself or those who had been unfair to me.

To be sure that the letter would be delivered to its destination, I didn't drop it in the mailbox in our town, but took the local train to the Slavyansk Station and put it in the mailbox of the mail car on the train going to Kiev. This was at the end of July of 1939.

By this time the invisible hands of the vandals were systematically demolishing the brick fence of our garden. They were working with real tools supplied by some anonymous sponsor whose objective was to destroy the brick fence and to show us that we could not win our garden back intact. The way that the destruction of the brick fence was done showed without doubt that it was well organized and guided by somebody very competent who had control over the teenage vandals. There was no doubt that the only person who could give such an order was Comrade Byelokonye, who, as the head of the Department of People's Education of the Town of Slavyansk, was in charge of the orphanage. But there was no way to have proof of it because the Town Militia told me before that they do not protect the private gardens.

Meanwhile the vandals got better and better in their demolition skills. First they were making large holes at the base of the fence by pounding and breaking up the cemented bricks with picks or pickaxes. Then they were moving up the wall until the sections of the fence could be pushed to the ground leaving piles of broken bricks. After the first opening in the fence was made, the vandals started in the same systematic way as with the brick fence to destroy the fruit trees. My heart was wrung with pain and my soul was afflicted with anguish to see how the branches of the trees full of ripening fruits were savagely torn from the tree trunks and scattered on the ground. It seemed to me that cruel fate was laughing at my dream of having a beautiful garden. There was no end to my severe suffering and my nerves were worn out.

From Nikita Khrushchev there was no answer, but I had a feeling in my heart that I should not lose my hope. I always remembered him to be on the side of the oppressed peasants when we were reading Pushkin's novel in my class at the Rabfak. In this case I hoped that he should perceive that I was the oppressed.

Late in the fall I was suddenly summoned to the office of the same communist Byelokonye who was the first to announce to me that they were taking my garden from

me. When I entered his office, he was sitting at his desk and, without answering my greeting or raising his head to look at me, he announced with an angry voice, "We don't need your garden! You may keep it! A decision was made to leave it for your use." With an inflection of innocence in my voice I asked him, "To whom should I be thankful for this decision?"

"It doesn't matter," was his short and dry answer. And he dismissed me by cutting my audience short, "You may go!"

The news about my victory spread very quickly around the town. My friends notified me that the Town's Communist Party Committee received a letter with a severe reprimand to those who deserved it for the way the local authorities had handled the case with my garden. I understood that this was an answer by Nikita Khrushchev to my letter.

Had he done it from his magnanimity, or because he had really understood the rightfulness of my actions? Or maybe he remembered my sincere willingness to help him to learn when he was my student seventeen years ago. Maybe both reasons were partially true. But most likely, Nikita Khrushchev wanted to act like the popular hero whom he admired. I remembered how Nikita enjoyed the actions of Yemyelyan Pugachev,<sup>10</sup> who, after he obtained power, pardoned the officer Grynyev, who fought against him, for the favor he received from him in the past. And he bragged before him, "You see, I am not such a bloodsucker as they say about me in your landowners' clan."

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, "Bor'ba za nash sad" [in Russian], *Nikita Khrushchev v voikh vospominaniakh* [Nikita Khrushchev In My Memoirs], MS, TS (Manchester, CT, 1967), trans and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro

2. See the chapter "Return to My Hometown of Slavyansk."

3. See the chapter "The Newspaper's Proofreader."

4. The Young Communards Street - A former *Zhelyesnodorozhnay* - Railroad Street.

5. From the "Plan of the Property."

6. From the documents: "The Agreement" and the "Property Registration."

7. Yekaterina Fyedorovna Grudzinsky, a daughter of Fyodor Iosyfovich Grudzinsky, maternal uncle of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky.

8. Militiaman.

9. Document written in Ukrainian.

10. A popular hero from the novel "Captain's Daughter" by the famous Russian poet and writer Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin.

## Ivan Gavriylovich Berezhnoy

By Olga Gladky Verro

As Recounted by Orest M. Gladky and Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Additions by Yelena Ivanovna Berezhnaya Mykailova

Tonya's younger brother Ivan,<sup>1</sup> like his brother Alexander and like many other young men during the civil war, was a volunteer in the White Army. He served in one of the units of General Vrangal on the Southern front fighting the Reds. He was wounded and was placed in a military hospital. Before Ivan's wounds were healed, the Red Army division overran the hospital. When he had completely recuperated, the Red commander gave him a discharge from the hospital with the inscription on the document: *vrangelyevets*.<sup>2</sup>

This word became his bad omen for the rest of his life. Having such an inscription in his document, Ivan decided not to return home immediately. He stopped in one village where he found a place to stay and work for one wealthy farmer, who also had a very beautiful daughter for whom he wanted to find a husband. Well, Ivan married the farmer's daughter and remained living with the farmer's family and worked for him. However, after one year of hard work in the fields Ivan understood that this life was not for him and that the young wife, although very pretty, was empty-headed and vain; he grew tired of her. The marriage was short-lived and he decided to go home. One day he collected his few belongings in a bundle and left the village, taking the train going to Slavyansk from the nearest station.

When Ivan returned to Slavyansk, he found the sad news that his brother Alexander, his mother, and sister Olga had died. Other news was that his father had lost his homes, remarried, and was living in his new wife's home with the youngest son Petya. The good news was that his older brother Nikolay was living with his family in his hometown and working in the Town Soviet office in the Department of Town's Communal Property.

Therefore, Ivan found a room for himself and enrolled in a short course in bookkeeping. At the completion of the course his brother Nikolay found employment for Ivan as a bookkeeper in his office.

Ivan was an attractive young man, very much resembling his father, although he was taller. He had his father's oblong face, dark wavy hair, brown eyes, and tan complexion. He had a likable and jovial personality and made friends easily. Ivan liked to play billiards and was a very skillful billiard player and this hobby occupied all his free time. In the evenings one could always find him in a club having a good time in the company of young men and women, and he played late into the wee hours of the morning.

Soon after arriving in Slavyansk Ivan met Maria Fyedorovna Dyeryughina. She was a daughter of a former landowner, Fyedor Grigoryevich Dyeryughin, whose origins were from a rich landowner's and timber merchant's family. He was married twice. With his first wife, who was also from a rich landowners family, he had a daughter by the name Nina. When his first wife died, he married Yelena Aghyevyeyevna Kulakova, who was from a poor family living in the town of Isyum. They also had a daughter Maria, whom they used to call Musya, and who was born in Isyum. They gave her a good education appropriate for a girl from a rich landowner's family.

Fyedor Grigoryevich Dyeryughin lived a dissipated life. He liked to drive around in a carriage or a sled harnessed three horses abreast, called troika, and to have a good time frequenting good restaurants in the company of women. After three years of enduring her husband's follies, his second wife reneged on her married life and she didn't admit her husband to her bedroom any more.

After the revolution the Soviet government had dispossessed Fyedor Grigoryevich Dyeryughin of his land, property, and riches. He and his wife Yelena took up residency in the town of Isyum. He remained completely ill-equipped for life, without any means of support, and he and his wife suffered privation and poverty for the rest of their lives.

Their daughter Maria Fyedorovna had attended the secretarial courses before her father was dispossessed. She had furnished her room in town with some of the family's furniture, bedding, and lots of decorative heirlooms. After completing her studies, she remained in the town of Slavyansk and was appreciated as a very good secretary in the offices where she worked.

Maria Fyedorovna was a pleasant, good-mannered, and educated young woman. Although she was on the plump side, she had beautiful facial features, which she enhanced with make-up unusual for women at those times. She also had a full crown of well-groomed, wavy, light brown hair. She was always well dressed and adorned herself with jewelry. Most of her outfits were made over by a dressmaker into fashionable clothes from the vintage clothes of best quality fabrics not found any longer on the market in those days. She wore high heel shoes and fine silk stockings, all remaining from the good old times when her family lived well before the revolution.

She lived in one large room, furnished with the only remaining possessions from her native home that belonged to her rich family, which she had received when she attended the secretarial courses. The room was full of good vintage furniture packed close together to fit it all in and leave space for a stove and dining table. A lot of knick-knacks, such as statuettes, vases, and china were placed everywhere. In one corner of the room stood a large bed covered with a heavy bedspread and a pile of plump goose feather pillows. Near her bed stood an *étagère* full of books that she was constantly reading.

After a short courtship Ivan Gavriylovich Berezhnoy and Maria Fyedorovna Dyeryughina got married and they lived in her room. In the beginning everything looked good for them. Vanya and Musya, as they called each other affectionately, both worked and had enough to live comfortably for those days.

Musya liked to eat well and, although she was brought up in landowner's family where there was a cook who prepared their food, she managed quite well to do her best in cooking. For some reason, she cooked wearing her good clothes without ever putting on an apron, though she would change her high-heel shoes and put on her slippers. What she hated most was to clean up after the meal and to tidy up the room. After a full day of work she liked to lie down and relax reading one of her favorite books. Vanya had to get used to seeing a pile of dirty dishes left to be washed until the next day and to have dust left for days on the furniture and on the knick-knacks.

Ivan, like all young men, had to have a military card and military registration in the local GPU. He procrastinated with the registration as long as he could, knowing that the only document about his whereabouts during the civil war had that word *vrangelyevets* written on it. But the office manager insisted, "You know very well that all young men have to have a military card and have to be registered. Out of respect for your brother Nikolay I didn't rush you, waiting until you did it yourself. But now my superiors have checked your records and are insisting that I make you comply. If you don't register, we have to fire you." Well, Ivan went to the GPU and got registered. And on his military card

on the line where it was stated "previous military service" it was marked in distinct letters *vrangelyevets*.

As soon as he presented his military card to the manager, he told him that they couldn't employ former *byelogvardyeyets*<sup>3</sup> in the office of the Town Soviet. Ivan came home all upset about losing his work, but Musya calmed him down, reassuring him that she had a good employment and there was no big worry about how they would live while he looked for another place to work.

"After all," she reasoned, "Town Soviet is choosier about the political purity of people who work there. In the other offices this might not be so important."

In fact, since there was at that time a shortage of qualified bookkeepers, Ivan very soon found another place of employment. They did not ask right away to show them his military card and Ivan certainly did not volunteer to show it to them. But after several months the administration asked about his military registration, and the same happened again. The manager told him, "Ivan Gavriylovich, I like you and I know your father and respect him... Your work is excellent... But you know how it is in these difficult times... I will put myself in trouble with the authorities, if they find out that I employ *byelogvardyeyets*. Believe me, there is nothing personal against you."

This time Ivan decided to change towns and try his fortune elsewhere. He would visit with his wife on his days off and work in the surrounding towns using the same tactic of waiting to show his military registration for as long as possible. And he changed his place of employment many times.

Then it came time to register for elections for the Soviets and Ivan had to register as a resident in Slavyansk and to show to the authorities his military card. As a former *byelogvardyeyets*, Ivan was deprived of his civil rights, or as it was coined at that time he became a *lishenyets*. This added to his difficulties in seeking employment since now everywhere they were also requesting the resident registration documents. Ivan decided to try looking for employment somewhere very far from his hometown, hoping that this would help cover up his tracks. They moved to the town of Stalino, former Yuzovka, where both found employment.

There Vanya and Musya had a daughter. She was born on May 4, 1936 in the town of Stalino. They named her Yelena, but affectionately they called her Lena, Lenchka, or Lyalya. Musya found a woman to look after her daughter and she continued to work. However, after Ivan again lost his job for the same reasons as before, Musya decided to return to Slavyansk with her daughter. She became the major breadwinner in the family since Vanya had to constantly change jobs.

Vanya traveled for several years, returning between jobs to visit with his wife and small daughter. This wandering life was taking its toll on him, and to forget his troubles he turned to drinking.

For some time during his visits home he was able to keep himself away from vodka. Then things got worse and he was no longer able to control his drinking. His daughter Yelena remembered very vividly one episode that remained imprinted in her mind.<sup>4</sup> It happened when she was about four years old. She was happily playing in the courtyard with the neighbors' children when she heard somebody screaming, "Lena, your father is drunk and he is crawling near the outhouse and scattering the candies around!" Although she was very young, she became ashamed of her father and ran inside their one-room apartment and hid herself under the table. Then she saw her

father crawling through the door into the room. He was uttering loud, senseless, but obviously menacing phrases, and screaming, threatening somebody. His wife Musya got scared, grabbed Lena in her arms, and ran away to the courtyard. They returned when Vanya fell asleep on the floor.

One summer<sup>5</sup> during her vacation, Musya went with her daughter to visit her parents in Isyum. While she was away, Ivan came home after being dismissed from another job. After a few days Musya unexpectedly returned home, leaving her daughter with her mother. She found her husband in a terrible state and didn't know what to do with him.

She ran to the only place where someone could help her, to her sister-in-law Tonya's house nearby, just across the railroad tracks on Railroad Street. Crying, she implored, "For God's sake, Tonya, Orest Mikhailovich, come and help me! I have just returned home. I cannot recognize my room. Vanya is sitting there and drinks... On the table are several empty and full bottles of vodka..."

Orest said, "Tonya, I will go to see what is happening to your brother. You women stay here and wait until I return."

He described the scene he found there when he arrived at their one-room apartment that was in complete chaos, pillows and bedspread on the floor, chairs in disarray or upside down, books scattered everywhere, and his brother-in-law Vanya sitting at the table and drinking.

"Vanya, my dear brother, what are you doing?" I asked him.

"Dear Or-rest, I am... dr-r-rink-k-ing," he answered.

"I can see it, but why?"

"Don't you wor-ry, I have... al-l-lmost fi-i-i-nished... My w-w-wife has retur-r-rned home so-o-oner then I ex-p-p-pected," he answered, slurring syllables as a drunken man who has lost control of his speech.

"But why, Vanya? What happened?" I insisted.

"Nothing new, e-ev-v-erything as it was before, my dear br-r-rother, Orest." And after a short pause he continued, "It's-s good... that she didn't br-r-ring with her our daughter... It... wou-u-uld have been a sha-a-ame, to... s-s-e-e me in such s-s-state, she wou-u-uldn't under-r-r-stand. But you... should."

He stated the last words with tears in his eyes and, covering them with his hands, dropped his head on the table.

When he recovered from his desperate thought, he raised his head, supporting it under the chin with the palms of both hands and elbows securely placed on the table. Then he continued to explain his actions with a question, "What has one to do when there is no place to escape? Everywhere I go, they fire me." Supporting his chin helped him to control the slur in his speech.

I told him very cautiously, "But you have a job."

"A job?!" he interrupted me in a loud voice and smiled bitterly. "That's why I stay away from my family, to keep them far from my troubles. There is no work for me anywhere!"

"What you mean 'anywhere'?" I asked him.

Vanya silently took a wallet out of his pocket and pulled out his military and voters registration cards. "To you, dear brother, I can show it, to all the others, I can't..."

Musya, who had entered the room and was observing in silence until now,

interrupted, "What are you doing, Vanya? You cannot show such papers to anybody!"

"Musya, I know who I am talking to... I haven't lost my brains in vodka... Don't you worry, I never show them to strangers." Then he opened the small gray military card and pointed at the line, "Read here. What does it say?"

I read aloud, "*Vrangelyevyets*."

"Yes, yes, dear brother, you read it right, *vrangelyevyets*! Nothing else! That's enough to make me drink... You should excuse me, but my brain is working... sa-tis-fac-tor-r-rily... You see, during any year as *vrangelyevets* I have to change four and many times up to five times my place of work. And every year or two I have to change my geographical location. From Caucasus to Siberia I tried them all..."

"But nobody is touching you, I mean, you are free?" I asked him almost reassuring that he was safe.

"Thank God, until now I was able to change jobs so quickly that nobody bothered to follow up on my whereabouts. But... you know, sometimes I really think that it would have been probably better if they took me and shut me..."

"Vanya! What are you saying?!" exclaimed Musya, clasping her hands.

Vanya looked at her and asked, "Where do I have to go?..." Then he turned to me and said, "Listen, Orest, they hire me, I work hard. They are pleased with me. I wait as long as I can to register for military service. So far everything is fine. But after more than two or three months one cannot wait... There is always somebody who will remind you, 'And when will you, dear comrade, get registered? It's time to do it... Please, don't procrastinate any longer.' Well enough, I go and register. They don't say anything... But... when you return to work, that's the end... That's how it has been all my life. Now, dear brother, you know why I am drinking... And probably, I am not the only one..."

"But you have a family, Vanya," I tried to reason with him.

"It's my unintentional sin," answered Ivan with a deep sigh. "I know now that I shouldn't have got married... It was not a mistake... I didn't know what it was, this 'workers and peasants' dictatorship. Well, it is better to say that I thought I knew... That's why I was *vrangelyevyets*... But I didn't expect that they would continue their vendetta for the duration of my terrestrial life!"

"Why don't you lose your military card?" I tried to suggest to the desperate Vanya.

"I did, but it was useless... They asked me to request a new one from my previous place of registration. And it started all over again..." And he explained, "That's why I drink... And will continue to drink," he said hopelessly.

Then looking at his wife with pity added, "And you Musya, don't regret it if I don't return here anymore... You see, I can be neither a husband for you, nor a father for our daughter. You have to leave me alone, I am worse than a plague-stricken."

Vanya poured a full glass of vodka and drank it, at one draught, then took a piece of bread, smelled and salted it and put it in his mouth. "That's better," he commented, stroking the bottle affectionately.

Then he looked again at Musya and said, "You better leave me alone! 'Neither tears nor kisses...' " he recited a phrase from a popular song. "I shall be a stranger for you and you shall be strangers for me. You better leave me to suffer alone..." And he suddenly had dropped heavily his whole upper body on the table in semi-consciousness. I understood that at that point neither discussions nor persuasions could serve any purpose. Musya made a sign to me to go outside. I promised to stop by tomorrow,

when Vanya had sobered up.

The next day I came to see Vanya early in the afternoon, when Musya was at work and he was alone. Ivan was lying in bed recuperating from yesterday's drinking bout. I noticed that he had aged a lot, looked thin and undernourished, a sign that alcohol was taking a toll on his body. Vanya was embarrassed about his behavior and told me that he was tired of his migratory way of life and, in trying to justify himself, he engaged in a long monologue explaining what was happening to him.<sup>6</sup>

"I have never been a drunkard before and I never had drinking bouts. But the last several years were dreadful for me and I started to drink. And I was drinking so much that probably never in my life could happen it again. To tell you the truth, I never was drawn to vodka; on the contrary, vodka always disgusted me. But I was intentionally drinking just to forget myself, my loved ones, and everything around me. I was drinking until I would lose my consciousness.

"I was drinking because after caring so passionately for my motherland during my youth, I have been forced now to hate what they have done to it... I was drinking because all my young years I gave to Russia, which I loved like my mother, my sister, my bride. For that love I sacrificed the best years of my life by volunteering in the White Army... And now... Now I have to forget all of it, my love, my joy, my happiness and my Russia... Now I am punished for it by those devil's Soviets. That's why I am forced to hate! Can you understand this?"

He looked at me and said,<sup>7</sup> "Listen one more time 'I am forced to hate!' But hate is not in my nature. It was hard for me to hate, and I suffered. Every time I suffered I found one solution to alleviate it—vodka.

"I hated vodka, but I was drinking it. I looked at it with disgust, but swallowed it like quinine, like castor oil. But I swallowed it. Because for some time after that I was able to forget everything around me. I was transformed into a 'thing.' And then I couldn't perceive anything outside of me, neither the evil of the Bolshevik's system, nor the injustice inflicted by it everyday on me and on other people's life, nor my soul's pains, nor the sadness in my heart. I was becoming an object, about which one could say without regret, 'Without heart, without soul, because he has dissolved his life in alcohol!'

"During that time God's world grew dark and I didn't feel alive. I felt then like I was between life and death... But it wasn't a state of bliss, like many could imagine my state of inebriation. No, it was a state of an inanimate, talking doll capable of making sounds of a few words with simple meaning and able to open and close his eyes. When I was in this state, I felt like someone was placing me in a cardboard box and was hiding me in a big trunk or wardrobe where the smell of naphthalene, like an anesthesia, was putting me completely asleep." Ivan stopped and looked at me shaking his head."

Then he began again to talk in short phrases pausing between them, "Yes, I drink... I hate vodka, I look at it with disgust... I look with disdain at drunkards... But I drink. Now you know why. To forget the present day reality of life... To forget this crazy place called the Soviet Union... To forget not only my small misfortune—which the Almighty had protected to become even worse so far—but to forget this horror that has struck all the people in my country... I cannot fight this evil power; I don't have the strength... And I drink to forget my helplessness... Until now, I had hoped that things would change one day. It's not my fault that this hope deceived me... And it deceived not only me, but many like me..."

After pouring all his bitterness out of his soul, Ivan couldn't continue his monologue. Exhausted, he abandoned his arms alongside his skinny body.

I felt that he was waiting for me to give him absolution. I said, "Dear brother, I understand all your frustrations—I suffer as much as you are suffering—I have nothing to add to what you have said. The only difference between you and me is that I keep away from vodka." I told him a few words of support, a few suggestions on how to cope with the situation, but all this was of little help for Ivan. I left him lying in bed to recuperate from intoxication of the day before.

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1. The younger brother of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky.
  2. The name coined by the Bolsheviks for the former volunteers in the White Army who fought them under the command of General Vrangeli.
  3. Former White Guard, a generalized name coined by the Bolsheviks for all who served in the White Army.
  4. As recounted by Yelena Ivanovna Berezhnaya Mikailova, daughter of Ivan Gavriylovich Berezhnoy, by telephone, trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1998.
  5. Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhailov, pseud.), "Vrangelyevyets" [in Russian], *Vo ymya chego?*, MS, TS, 1951, selected passages, trans. and ed. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. [Author added more information and directed the editor to change the fictitious names to the real names of the people in the story—fictitious names in the original version were used to conceal and protect true identity of living persons from NKVD persecutions in the Soviet Union]. Also published in different form as. Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhailov, pseud.), "Vrangelyevyets" [in Russian], newsp. *Rossia*, no. 4900 (New York: Rossia Publishing, June 21, 1952). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
  6. Orest M. Gladky (R. Mikhnyevich. pseud.), "Na kanikulakh" [in Russian], journ. *Zhar Ptyza*, (San Francisco, February-March, 1956), excerpts, trans. and ed. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1994. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## An Act Of Despair

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

Two days after<sup>1</sup> the "feast during the plague," as Ivan himself called his drinking-bouts,<sup>2</sup> he walked outside. His head was still heavy and his feet were not yet stepping securely over the sidewalk. But a decision taken as a toast with the last drink was unbending, "I have to end this ordeal." It was a decision to commit a sin, but he couldn't live this way anymore. "Let the GPU take care of me," he decided.

He reached the GPU headquarters, entered the front door, and announced, "Arrest me!"

They led him directly to the chief of the GPU<sup>3</sup> office. Ivan repeated his request, "Arrest me!"

A little man with dark hair was sitting behind the desk. He calmly removed his heavy horn-rimmed spectacles, placed them on the desk, and slowly approached Ivan. "Are you out of your mind? It's the first time that I have heard such a request," he said with astonishment. "Are you some kind of a criminal?"

"Yes, I am the criminal," Ivan answered firmly.

The GPU chief walked toward a big window and sat halfway on the windowsill. Then without looking at the self-proclaimed criminal, calmly asked, "Tell me, what kind of a crime you have committed?"

"Being born on this God's earth," Ivan answered.

The GPU chief turned sharply toward Ivan and ordered him, "Sit down and tell me everything. But try to make sense out of what you are saying!"

Ivan pulled out his military card, threw it on the chief's desk, and sat down in a chair. The chief walked toward the desk, took the card, and after putting on his spectacles and inspecting the card commented, "A-a-a, my dear, you are *vrangelyevyets*."

"Yes," answered Ivan and added a proverb, "What is written with a pen, cannot be chopped off with a hatchet!"

"Well," asked the GPU chief, "What is your crime?"

"That's it!" stated Ivan. "That's the crime!"

"Are you working?" questioned the GPU chief.

"No!" Ivan replied harshly.

"Why?" asked the GPU chief very calmly.

"Nobody will hire me!" Ivan screamed and nervously pulled his small penknife out of his pocket. In desperation he began to cut his wrists and poke the blade into his chest. He felt himself suffocating and began to scream, "No! It is impossible to live like this! Arrest me, or kill me, or let me live!" Ivan was becoming nervously exhausted and started to talk in hardly connected phrases, "Let me live at least for a while like a normal human being... I honestly looked to find work... traveled everywhere... from Caucasus to Vladivostok... everywhere it's the same... I've lost everything... lost my wife and my daughter... I am the criminal... *Vrangelyevyets*... deport me... shoot me!" And the loud burst of sobbing of an adult man resounded in the large room of GPU chief's office and beyond in the corridor.

The GPU chief was now sitting at his desk and unemotionally listening to the incoherent "confession" of a "criminal." He did not even stop Ivan from cutting himself.

"Desperation," with a wicked smile the GPU chief stated, more to himself than to the man sitting in front of him. Then he added spitefully, "What are you complaining about? You are lucky that until now nobody has touched you. You were capable of fighting us? Now learn to live with us."

"But how?!" asked crying Ivan. "At least help me to find work."

"This is not an employment office," the GPU chief said and added, "Have you lived somehow until now? Continue to live the same way."

"Is that a life?" asked Ivan bitterly.

"For you, there is no other way," confirmed the GPU chief. "Then you had better arrest me, put me in prison, deport me..." pleaded Ivan.

"I have no such orders," replied the GPU chief calmly.

"I tried to steal... to be arrested," explained Ivan.

"Well, what happened then?" asked the GPU chief with amusement.

Ivan explained bitterly, "They caught me, because I was not running away... then brought me to *militsia* quarters... they beaten me unmercifully and then... they let me go..."

"Wonderful!" ridiculed him the GPU chief. "For being foolish you didn't deserve

anything more."

"What can I do now?" asked Ivan.

"First, calm yourself down," said the GPU chief, "and then..." Ivan looked at him expecting to hear some meaningful suggestion. "Then, go and find yourself a place to work."

Ivan replied hopelessly in a feeble voice, "But nobody will hire me..."

"If you search well, you will find something."

Ivan began to beg him, "Couldn't you help me, not as a GPU chief but as a human being?"

The GPU chief looked at Ivan with disdain and told him bluntly and sternly, "This I cannot do. Clean up the blood, button-up your shirt, and get out of here. And keep in mind that no good shall come from this kind of performance. And in the future don't repeat such foolish actions."

Ivan suddenly felt weak. All the energy and decisiveness had left his body and mind. He got scared when he realized where he was and the kind of risk he had placed himself in.

The GPU chief called an agent and pointing at Ivan said, "See this wailing creature to the door."

Ivan got out of the building and slowly walked toward his home. He was as if in a trance, without thoughts or desires. He walked in the room and collapsed on the floor.

He woke up late in the afternoon, aching from sleeping all day on the hard floor. Suddenly he remembered his visit to the GPU. He felt not only nauseated from what happened, but became scared for the consequences of that visit. The GPU chief had been too calm and too indifferent to his confessions. If he didn't have instructions to arrest him yesterday, he might now after Ivan's foolish behavior had attracted attention to himself. The GPU chief could probably receive orders today or tomorrow.

He jumped up and collected a few items in his bag and quickly walked out of the room. Without waiting for the local railroad branch Vyetka train, he reached the railroad station by foot; there he boarded the first freight train going north. "It will take me far away from my hometown", he thought, accommodating himself on the floor of the car.

In about a month Musya received a letter from the town of Yakutsk in Siberia. Ivan wrote to that he was working as a bookkeeper in one of the city offices.

"For how long?" she thought with a sigh.

Ivan's daughter Lena remembers that her mother never told her anything bad about her father and never accused him of anything. Her impression about her father remained sorrowful for all his suffering. She believed that he was an unfortunate man who probably couldn't find himself and his place in life and that everything went wrong and had been distorted in his life. She felt that God should forgive him for his intentional or unintentional sins.

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1. (Orest M. Gladky [O. Mikhailov, pseud.], "Otchayaniye" [in Russian], *Vo ymya chego?*, MS, TS, 1952, excerpts, trans. Olga Gladky Verro, 1994. [Fictitious names, which in the original version were used to conceal and protect true identity of persons living in the Soviet Union from NKVD persecution were changed by the author to real names.] Also published in different form as Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhailov, pseud.), "Otchayaniye" [in Russian], newsp. *Rossia*, no. 4925 (New York: Rossia Publishing, June 29, 1952). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "Ivan Gavriylovich Berezhnoy."

## Toll The Bells For Yakovlyev

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

The stonemason Yakovlyev was known not only in the town of Slavyansk, but throughout the surrounding towns from the pre-revolutionary times when free enterprise was a way of doing business in the old Russia.<sup>1</sup> Whenever any building was begun someone immediately remarked, "What about the stonework?" The reply invariably was, "That's a job for Yakovlyev." Someone else would confirm it, "Of course, Yakovlyev could do that."

Poor Yakovlyev often found it difficult to get rid of important callers. "Filip Filipovich, I cannot do it. I am already up to my ears in work and I have not enough workmen to do it all," he would say to some townsman wanting to build a small stone house, or to some manager of a factory whose owner suddenly wished to enlarge his buildings. "Get the Postnikovs or Semenikhins," he would suggest, "They are good craftsmen. I can recommend them."

"Yes, master Yakovlyev," the customer would reply, "but the Postnikovs are inclined to be a little slipshod in their work, and the Semenikhins are really stovemakers and not stonemasons. Look, I will even add five kopecks more for..."

"Not even for fifty kopecks more, Filip Filipovich," Yakovlyev would answer. "I have contracts for the whole season. Once I have promised to do the work, I keep my word." Filip Filipovich would argue and argue with Yakovlyev, but in the end he had to employ the Postnikovs or the Semenichins because Yakovlyev's word was final.

Yakovlyev lived with his family quite comfortably. He had built himself a good and convenient stone house; in the winter it was warm and in the summer cool. He had a workshop, not large but efficient. His workmen were all keen, hard workers. He was a good judge of men and took care in choosing his workers. If he considered that they would be useful to him, he would employ and train them, but, if not, he would not take them on, and he never made a mistake. When the First World War began in 1914, he had fewer workers because some were called up by the army; but when the revolution came, he was left without any hands.

Brown-haired, wiry and little, Yakovlyev was full of fiery energy. He did not walk—he positively skipped along and ran. Work seemed mere child's play to him—he did everything easily and swiftly. It was this attitude that kept him from becoming downhearted; when he had no more men in his workshop, he put all his hopes in his own skillful hands. Now he worked harder than ever, not so often for money, but for the goods he could obtain in exchange for his work—here, for a wheat-grower, there for a miller, and, elsewhere, for the pork butcher.

In 1918 he reached his fiftieth year but his energy was in no way diminished. As

for work, there was never any lack of that; indeed, there was enough to do to last a lifetime, if he wanted it. "Why worry?" thought Yakovlyev. "If I can't get any workmen at present for my workshop, then I must just teach my sons the skills. In the summer they will finish their schooling; then they shall go to work with me."

Spring came early that year. It was warm and dry. In April the Bolsheviks began to escape from the town. The Germans pressed on. They were seeking their *lebensraum*<sup>2</sup> in the black earth steppes of Southern Russia, the Ukraine. As the front line came near, the Reds who were in power in Slavyansk at that time put up a show of defending the town and engaged in a small fight. It was not really a battle, they fired a few rounds at the Germans, who attacked three times stronger with running fire and then entered the town without opposition.

Three or four days after the battle, Oscar Kristoforovich Metzger, a professor of German at the Men's Lyceum who had been appointed by the German commandant to be his interpreter, came running to Yakovlyev. He remembered that ten years ago Yakovlyev had built a small house for him on one of the central streets.

"Master Yakovlyev, you are requested to go to the commandant's headquarters; it is very important."

"Well," thought Yakovlyev, "the commandant has asked me to come, I must obey him, since he is now in command here." However, he got ready unwillingly, since he had already started to work.

The commandant spoke Russian in just the same way as Mister Metzger, "Master Yakovlyev, two German soldiers have been killed and buried. I want you to make a tombstone for their grave. I will pay you in German money."

Yakovlyev thought, "How could I refuse to make it?" And answered, "I can do it, of course. As regards payment, that is as you shall please, Commandant."

"You need not worry, master Yakovlyev," replied Commandant, "you can trust the word of a German officer."

The professor showed Yakovlyev where the German soldiers were buried. Yakovlyev fetched his two sons to help him and set to work on the tombstone. The younger son Nikolka, who was only twelve years old, helped by running errands, but the elder son was able to assist his father like a real apprentice craftsman.

At the end of the week the tombstone was ready and the stonemason Yakovlyev was paid for his work with German *reichsmarks*. The Germans didn't require him to do anything further for them; he continued quietly working for the townsmen and sometimes went to a village to earn bread for the winter. The Germans didn't remain in town for very long and Yakovlyev could never spend their money.

In the following years governments changed very quickly, but finally the Soviet government established itself. Throughout this time practically nothing changed in Yakovlyev's life, except that the Bolsheviks evicted him from his own house and from the workshop because he was considered to be a businessman. He continued to work independently, although the Soviets tried to make him join a Soviet Workers' Brigade, and then some sort of a builders' union. But he always gave the same answer, "I have never been accustomed to work under anyone and I am too old to start now."

After eighteen years, that is to say in 1936 or 1937, when he was sixty-eight, the stonemason was arrested by the NKVD and held for questioning. The interrogator asked him, "In 1918, was it you who made a memorial tombstone for the two German

soldiers who had been killed?"

"Yes, I did," answered Yakovlyev without hesitation or any suspicion that it could incriminate him.

"With whom did you work?" continued the interrogator.

"With my two sons," replied Yakovlyev, "but they were just teenagers then."

"You are wicked man," accused the NKVD interrogator and specified more clearly, "You are a counterrevolutionary and a fascist sympathizer."

Then, the NKVD agents abused poor Yakovlyev for a couple of hours with violent accusations, which the NKVD used in these cases, either to satisfy their sadistic pleasure in taunting their victims, or to convince themselves and the accused that he was really guilty. After two hours his two sons, who by now were grown men, joined Yakovlyev in his cell and they wondered why they had been arrested.

In the morning Yakovlyev's daughter came hurrying to the NKVD headquarters to find out why her father and two brothers had been arrested.

"You!" screamed the NKVD agent. "Why are you trying to defend your father?! It would have been better for him if he had not made the tombstones for the fascists. In any case, this is not a court case. No accusations will be made and there will be no trial. There was no need for you to come here; the matter will be arranged by the NKVD without your interference." And the young woman was ordered to go home.

And the matter was indeed arranged by the NKVD! After about six months she and her mother received a short note in a worn out envelope stamped: "Passed by censor." In it was written only, "Send us warm underclothes, socks and coats, and also some garlic." That was all. She and her mother mailed the package, but they never found out if their loved ones had received it because no more letters came from them.

People who knew Yakovlyev and his sons wondered: "What was their crime?" "Why did they really arrest them?" "Why were they banished?" For those whose minds are normal, it is not possible to fathom the psychology of murderers and perverted political psychopaths torturing the innocent stonemasons.

Yakovlyev's whole life was an open book to the people of the town. He was religious, hardworking, honorable. He led a blameless life, neither drank, nor smoke, never cheated or overcharged, and he never killed a man. Is it conceivable that the tombstone made by him eighteen years before for the two German soldiers killed in an open battle could be a proof that he was the enemy of the Soviet authorities? Did the making of that stone constitute a crime? One would not think so; rather, it would seem that to render a last service to an enemy honorably slain in a battle is a duty one owes even to the conquered.

But, perhaps the sixty-eight-year-old Yakovlyev really was the enemy of Stalin himself. It is possible that such people as this elderly stonemason and his sons might unite to make a grandiose tombstone to crush the life of the communist gang and even refuse money for their work. Perhaps the mad cowardice of the Bolshevik party leaders, who saw enemies even among themselves, had taught the Cains of the NKVD, the interrogators and the executioners, to foresee, when they dug their bloody hands into the past of the Soviet citizens that they might find a future enemy of the regime.

This is very possible, and it is not very difficult to believe; after all, Stalin had many enemies not only among the simple citizens, but also among his closest associates, and the NKVD executioners could become tomorrow's enemies, as did

many predecessors before them. Violent, treacherous, and terrible is the history of the Communist Bolshevik Party and its dictatorship.

Life was very difficult for a man under the Soviet rule. No one could foresee what thread in his past the NKVD would seize hold of and, by winding it into a great ball, use it to destroy him as a “counterrevolutionary” or “enemy of the people,” which in the Soviet system was equal to “criminal.”

Even in the midst of the most strenuous efforts of his working day and during restful sleep at night, many ordinary and law-abiding Soviet citizens are subconsciously going over their past, examining the most secret corners of their personal life:

“In 1918, a German soldier gave me a cigar...”

“In 1919, the Whites commandeered my horse and cart...”

“One Haydamak<sup>3</sup> came to my door and got water to drink...”

“In 1922, my daughter was christened...”

“I courted Tanya, who was a clergyman’s daughter...”

“Are any of my relatives living abroad?..”

“Last year, I am afraid I didn’t subscribe enough to the governmental bonds...”

“I encountered Ivanovich and talked to him on the street, and before the revolution he was...”

“The secretary of the local Communist Party looked very strangely at me yesterday...”

A million troubling thoughts, and at night there was also the strained listening. The sound of the automobile... “Did it stop nearby? Are the footsteps nearing our door? Have ‘they’ come for me?”

Lord, preserve and deliver the people of Russia.

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1. Orest M. Gladky (O. Mikhailov, pseud.), “Toll the Bells for Yakovlyev,” *Christian Democrat*, vol.10, No.11, (Oxford, Great Britain: Catholic Social Guild, Hinckley Leics: Samuel Walker printers and publishers, November 1959), 541-545, trans. W. Kate Hyne, 1958, ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1997. This episode was recounted by Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy about what happened to one of his acquaintances. It is not known if Yakovlyev and other names are the real names.]

2. A term of German imperialism - “a territory for political and economic expansion.”

3. Ukrainian nationalist soldier.

## Igor Mikhailovich Gladky

By Olga Gladky Verro

I met my uncle Igor<sup>1</sup> several times when I was a small child during my visits and a short stay with my paternal grandfather in Nikitovka and also when he visited us in the village of Nizhnyaya Krynka.<sup>2</sup> Later, when I was growing up, he visited us for only a few days at the time. I liked him very much because he was young like my uncle Petya, my mother’s youngest brother, and I felt closer to them, than to my other uncles who were older. From early childhood I got used to calling my uncles and aunts by their first

names without “uncle” or “aunt” added to it, and they got used to it. Therefore, I never called him Uncle Igor, but simply Igor.

Igor was the youngest child of Mikhail Makarovich Gladky and Nadyezhda Vikentyevna Mikhnyevich. He was born in 1912, a few years before the revolution, and his early childhood years were during the difficult times of the civil war in Russia. In 1920, when Igor was only eight years old, his mother died during the typhus epidemic raging in the country; his younger sister Vera, who was then in her teens, took care of him and of household chores. His father tried to give his younger son as much attention as he could during those hours when he was not at work at the railroad telegraph. He took Igor with him when he was rehearsing with the choir that he conducted.<sup>3</sup>

Igor attended the elementary school in Nikitovka that was irregularly held during the years of the civil war, and then he went to the town of Artyemovsk,<sup>4</sup> enrolled and attended the Artyemovsk’s Industrial Technicum. In 1932 Igor successfully graduated from the Technicum with a certificate as an electrical technician.

In 1933 he was drafted in the obligatory military service and served in the army through 1935. During that time he was stationed in several places in the Asiatic part of the country in the Uzbek Soviet Republic, in the towns of Kokand and Tashkent, and in the Turkmenian Soviet Republic in the town of Merv. After being discharged from military service in 1936, he returned to his native Ukraine.

First he went to visit his sister Vera, who during his absence got married to Fyodor Iosifovich Sokolovsky, whose first wife died following a very long illness. Vera moved from Nikitovka to live with her husband in Yasinovataya,<sup>5</sup> where he was employed as a communication agent at the railroad office. His old mother and young daughter Shura<sup>6</sup> also lived in the house. When Igor arrived there, Vera already had her own little daughter Svyetlana. The house was crowded, and after a few months Igor had to leave because his sister couldn’t accommodate him.

Then Igor went to visit his older sister Anya,<sup>7</sup> who lived with her common-law husband Sergey Ivanovich Plokhotin in a one- room apartment in Taganrog. Her husband was employed at the railroad station and lately was on the alert, paying close attention to inquiries into the political past of the employees that had been going on for some time. He knew that sooner or later his turn would come and he was trying to get transferred somewhere far from there. Anya told her brother that their situation was very shaky and that if the transfer didn’t come soon they were ready to flee from Taganrog at any time. This meant that Igor couldn’t remain living with them. Again, he stayed with them for only a few months.

Finally, he decided to visit his older brother Orest, hoping that the situation there could allow him to stay long enough to find work for himself. Thus, in the spring of 1938 he arrived in Slavyansk and found out that the situation in the family of his brother Orest was better<sup>8</sup> than that of his sisters and that maybe he could stay with him for a while as he looked for work.

At that time in the Soviet Union all emphasis was directed toward industrial development. To emphasize this a new Communist party slogan was coined: “We shall catch up and shall overtake the capitalist states in industrial development!” It was prominently and profusely used in the press. Big placards were placed on the walls of the factories, and it was proclaimed at all Communist party and workers’ meetings. Intensive development of the industry was going on in all areas and in all regions of the

country, and a person with technical education had no difficulty finding work.

Indeed, when Dmitry Pyetrovich Boyko, from whom we rented the apartment, suggested applying at the Soda Factory<sup>9</sup> where he worked, Igor was immediately hired as an electrical technician. The master of the electrical shop was a Communist and, by hiring Igor, he could delegate all the work to him while he maintained the title, the position, and better pay.

Igor applied at the factory office right away to have an apartment in the factory's apartment complex. However, being single, he could only have a room to share with some other family and he also had to wait for it. Meanwhile, he lived with us and we moved my bed to my parents' room, while Igor slept on the sofa in my room. In the beginning he was returning home right after work and eating supper with us. Then he began to come home late and my mother had to keep the food warm for him. Since it was becoming more frequent, she asked him, "Igor, I noticed that you come home late, did you find yourself a woman?"

Igor got embarrassed and answered rudely, "It is none of your business!"

My mother didn't expect such a harsh reaction to an innocent question. After all, her brother-in-law was of an age that there was nothing wrong in looking for the companionship of a woman. But we found out very soon that there was a reason for his outburst.

Soon after this incident Igor came home and simply said, "I got married. I am moving to my wife's apartment. I will invite you to meet her and my new family as soon as we settle down."

We were surprised that he had mentioned "the family," but my mother didn't ask him any questions and he didn't explain any details at that time.

After a week or so he invited us to visit him. We had to walk all the way to the outskirts of the town where workers' apartments had been built next to the Soda Factory. The apartment houses were built according to the standards of those days, two-story brick houses similar to those we lived in the hamlet of Kysyelyevka,<sup>10</sup> with wooden outhouses serving several buildings. The apartment was on the ground floor and Igor encountered us at the door.

As we entered, Igor presented to us his family, "This is my wife, Antonina Yulyevna,<sup>11</sup> and this is her mother Eva Yakovlyevna, but we call her Babushka." For some reason, the greetings were formal; we simply shook hands; there were no embraces and no kissing, as one would have expected greeting relatives.

Babushka was holding a baby boy who was about a year-and-a-half old, and Igor presented him to us, "This is Fredik,<sup>12</sup> my wife's son from her first marriage. He is now my son." It became clear to us that Igor had acquired a ready-made family.

Antonina Yulyevna prepared us a simple dinner and we all sat at the kitchen table while Babushka served the food. In talking with Antonina Yulyevna we found out that she was also working at the Soda Factory, while her mother took care of the baby. After dinner Antonina Yulyevna found a moment when Igor was talking with my father and told my mother that she was expecting Igor's baby and was hoping that it would be a girl.

She showed us the apartment, which was kept very clean. It consisted of one room and a kitchen, and she already had all the necessary furniture for the kitchen and the bedroom. The metal tubular double bed had a nice bedspread and the baby's bed

was standing beside it. There was a small wardrobe, a chair, and a hand-operated sewing machine was standing on the little table. In the kitchen was her mother's bed, stove, kitchen table, several chairs, and there were shelves for storing dishes, pots, and pans. On the windows simple cotton curtains were hung and some unframed pictures were placed on the walls.

I noticed that Babushka wore plain cotton clothing covered with a clean apron. She spoke with a foreign accent and was very solicitous with serving food and especially eager to please Igor. As soon as she cleared the table after dinner, Babushka took the baby and took care of him, allowing Antonina Yulyevna to socialize with us.

Antonina Yulyevna wore a simple dress made from cotton fabric and she proudly told us that she sewed it herself. It fitted close to her somewhat plump body already revealing some fullness in the abdomen, indicating that she was well advanced in her pregnancy. When we were leaving, my mother invited Igor and Antonina Yulyevna to come and visit us before the new baby would be born.

As we were walking home, which took us a good half-hour, we exchanged our opinions about Igor's family. I said that I liked the baby boy and Babushka and my mother agreed with that. But on my parents' minds were other aspects of Igor's sudden marriage. At some point my father had bluntly commented, "Either she trapped him, or he trapped himself!"

To this my mother replied, "Well, what had you expected? He had a very good time all those evenings that he was coming home late."

My father continued to reason, "She is a divorced woman and found a simpleton whom she could seduce and entangle him into a marriage."

But my mother replied, "But he was not an innocent man, he found an easy way to gratify himself hoping that he could get away with it. However in the long run he found a real bargain, a whole new family, a wife, a son, a mother-in-law that is ready to please him, and a furnished apartment to live in. He just had to walk in."

After a while my father asked. "Do you think he loves her?"

"Everything is possible," replied my mother, "but it seems more probable that he flopped into it..."

"After all, she does not represent anything special," reasoned my father. "She is not a beauty, not very educated, just an ordinary woman."

My mother replied, "Maybe he was looking to find only a pleasing woman."

There was a long pause in their discussion and then my mother resumed her reflections, "Orest, I think that you wrongly

assume that your brother's upbringing, education, and tastes are the same as yours. Remember, your mother died when Igor was very young and he grew up without her influence. He missed all that cultural milieu with which she surrounded you and your sisters Anya and Vera."

"It's true," replied my father, "Igor grew up during the troubled years of the civil war, when the only preoccupation was to find some food to fill the stomach. It was our young sister Vera who took care of him while our father was at work."

"Also, you should not forget," continued my mother, "he didn't attend the good old pre-revolutionary school and a gymnasium that could have given him good cultural background as the other children in your family had. And the Soviet *Technicum* that he attended gave him only technical education. You are forgetting that he is not culturally

sophisticated or very educated himself. I think that he found a woman that was more or less on his level and that she is probably just right for him.”

I was listening to my parents’ discussion and couldn’t figure out why it was so important to them to find out the reason why Igor married this woman. I understood only one thing, that my father expected his brother to marry an educated and more cultured woman and he was disappointed with Igor’s choice. My mother was trying to convince him that his brother didn’t need to meet the expectations of my father, but he couldn’t see it that way. I liked my uncle Igor and could not agree with their reasoning.

For some reason, my parents and Igor’s wife, right from the beginning when they met, didn’t call each other by their first names, as was usual in the family; they called her Antonina Yulyevna and she called my mother Antonina Gavriylovna and my father Orest Mikhailovich, as it was used respectfully with other people, but not usual with relatives.

Later Igor and Antonina Yulyevna came to visit us several times and we also went to visit them. During these visits we found out a lot about her family and her life. She and Igor told us that her father was Yulius Gauk and that his nationality was German by birth, but that he had lived before in the Baltic region.

Her mother Eva Yakovlyevna Svirebul was Latvian. They came to Ukraine with the whole family from the Latvian town of Dwinsk., also called Daugavpils. Her father had found work as a mechanic in the beer factory located in the hamlet of Rudchenkovka adjacent to the coal mine by the same name, in the region of Donetsk Basin.

Antonina Yulyevna had four brothers. The oldest brother Adolf was employed as a bookkeeper in Stalino. He was married and his wife’s name was Klavdia; they had a son Edward whom they called Edik. The second brother Nikolay also worked as a mechanic at the same beer factory with his father and remained there after his father died. He had a wife by the name Yevgeniya Govorukha, whom they called Zhenya, and they had a daughter Zhana. The third brother Otto was married to Yevgeniya Golovyna and they had one son. These three brothers, being of German ancestry, were arrested in 1937 and had all been deported and disappeared without any trace in the concentration lagers. The fourth brother Wilhelm was still free at that time.

Antonina Yulyevna got married in Rudchenkovka to a book-keeper with the last name Borisov. Her husband was a drunkard and a womanizer and she divorced him soon after their son Alfred was born. After that, she moved to Slavyansk with her mother and found work in one of the shops at the Soda Factory where she met Igor.

After marriage Igor adopted Fredik and changed Fredik’s last name from Borisov to Gladky. Antonina Yulyevna soon left her work at the Soda Factory because of pregnancy; her wish came true in January 1937 when their little daughter was born. They named her in memory of Igor’s mother Nadyezhda and they called her Nanochka.

In 1939 Antonina Yulyevna received the bad news that her fourth brother Wilhelm had also been arrested and disappeared. They didn’t accuse him of doing anything politically wrong, there were no accusations, no trial. It was the same reason—all four brothers were guilty only of having German names and ancestors and were paying the price for this “crime.” From the time of the revolution and the civil war the unwritten rule of the Bolshevik Party remained the same: “It is better to put in prison ten innocent men, than to leave one ‘enemy of the people’ free.”

The birth of Nanochka softened the attitude of my father toward the marriage of

his brother and brought our families closer. When my parents bought the home with the garden, Igor came often to visit us with the children, who liked to play in the courtyard and run on the alleys of the garden. I was very fond of my little cousins, who were very cute, and I liked to visit them. I liked it even more when they came to visit us.

Our neighbors had a good pedigree Spitz dog called Sharik, all white with a long silky coat and pointed ears. He adopted us right away and considered us as his second owners. We fed him and he was watching our home and didn't allow anybody to enter the gate. He would not only bark, but actually bite into the legs and clothing of anyone suspicious to him, especially the beggars. But with children this dog was a docile playmate. Fredik used to put his little sister Nanochka on Sharik's back.

She would grab the long fur to hold on, and the dog would allow her to ride, slowly walking with her on the long sidewalk from the house to the gate and back. In the beginning I was afraid that the dog would bite her if she pulled its fur too hard, but then I got used to it and every time Nanochka would come, Sharik would run and greet her and allow her and her brother Fredik to play with him.

At the end of the summer of 1939 my father's older sister Anna<sup>13</sup> suddenly came to visit us and her brother Igor and to meet his wife and family that she had never met. But during her short visit it became clear that the main reason why Anya came to see us was to tell her brothers that she was leaving Taganrog and to say good-bye to all of us because she anticipated that she would not be able to see her brothers and their families for a very long time.

She explained<sup>14</sup> that her common-law husband, Sergey Ivanovich Plokhotin, who was employed as a dispatcher on the big railroad station in Taganrog, had finally received a transfer to the small railroad station on the Turkmen-Siberian Rail Line near the town of Alma-Ata, the capital city of the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan. They were moving immediately from Taganrog to the Asiatic part of the Soviet Union.

I knew that they lived in Taganrog for long time and that he had been employed at the railroad station in and Anya was a nurse in a hospital. But at the time of their visit I was kept from knowing the reason for their sudden decision to move so far away. Only much later I found out the truth that there was an inquiry about railroad employees and someone warned Sergey that they were looking into his past. Since during the revolution and civil war he had been a junior officer in the White Cossacks Cavalry Regiment, he feared the usual persecution and the arrest as the "enemy of the people." Therefore, to cover his tracks, they decided it was better for him to move as far as possible from Taganrog. I also understood that this was the reason why they were not officially married to keep Anya safe in case he was arrested.

I did not remember my aunt Anya well because I had visited her last when I was about four years old. But from my visit in Taganrog I remembered vividly only the spectacle of the famous Durov Circus that my father took me to see. My parents often told me that Anya had taken care of me when I was just a toddler, when my mother was away at the health resort in Crimea for her migraine cure.

At the time of her very short, only a few days visit I was able to get to know her better. From the way she was talking, I made a conclusion that she was very opinionated against the NKVD, Bolsheviks, and the Soviet government, and was not afraid to talk about it with us. I overheard my father reminding her several times that she shouldn't talk in my presence so frankly and especially not to let me hear about her

husband's past. I thought, "He reprimands his sister, as if he thinks that I don't know what is going on in this country that people are disappearing for no reason at all and without trials."

Anya had just visited her younger sister Vera and her family. She told us that Vera was very unhappy right after she got married. She said, "Vera went through hard times while she was living with her mother-in-law. That witch was very quarrelsome and for some reason didn't like her new daughter-in-law. She constantly reminded her that her son's first wife was so good that Vera could never match her." Anya regretted that her younger sister Vera had become very nervous from all the quarrels with her husband's mother. And although now that they were living separately she remained very nervous.

Anya, who was always outspoken, criticized Vera for being impatient with her small daughter Svyetlana, for screaming at her, and for physically punishing her for small transgressions. But she partially justified her sister's behavior by explaining, "Vera was growing up at the time of revolution and civil war when she lost her mother and had a difficult task taking care of the family during the famine before she was in her teens. And she had taken care of you, Igor, and it was not the easiest thing to do—you were the first in her life that made her to become nervous."

The good-bye between the two brothers and their older sister was very emotional, as if everybody had a premonition that this was the last time that they would see her. And I was sorry that she was going to live so far away when I had just begun to know her.

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1. The younger brother of Orest M. Gladky. See the chapters "Family of Mikhail Makarovich Gladky" and "Home at Last."

2. See the chapter "The Village School."

3. See the chapter "Home at Last."

4. Former town of Bakhmut. See the chapter "The Last Gentleman."

5. The railroad station and town south of Nikitovka.

6. Nickname for Alexandra. See the chapter "Vera Mikhailovna Gladky Sokolovsky."

7. Nickname for Anna. Anna Mikhaylovna Gladky, the older sister of Orest M. Gladky.

8. See the chapter: "The Newspaper's Proofreader."

9. The factory was extracting the salty underground water and transforming it into various chemical products.

10. See the chapter "The Hamlet of Kisyelyevka."

11. Antonina Yuliusovna, from the original German first name of her father, Yulius, but she preferred to be called Yulyevna that didn't sound foreign.

12. Diminutive of Alfred.

13. From the photograph of Anya and her younger brother Igor sitting in the courtyard of their brother Orest during her last visit in Slavyansk.

14. See the chapter "The Village School."

## Teachers Conference In Kiev

By Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

## Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

It was the spring of 1940. Outside it was still cool, but the sun was already caressing the earth and lifting all hearts with its warm rays. I was in Kiev attending the first All Ukrainian Conference for the Improvement of the Professional Skills Of Teachers.<sup>1</sup> It was an unusual conference, the first one of its kind, and significant in its objectives. It was intended to serve as a starting event for the creation of the Institute for the Improvement of the Professional Skills of Teachers in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

All the best creative and experienced teachers were to have been assembled for that conference, like an experimental pedagogical laboratory. It was also significant because the delegates were selected in the capital city of Kiev in the Ukrainian Commissariat of People's Education on the merits of the papers presented by the teachers, and not as usual by the local authorities, who selected the delegates according to their Communist Party membership cards.

In the beginning of the school year the Ukrainian Commissariat of People's Education had mailed to all schools and Town's People's Education Curriculum Departments a letter in which the teachers were invited to write a methodological paper describing the experience of teaching their subject matter to their pupils. They were to submit these papers directly to the Commissariat Of People's Education in Kiev, bypassing all local authorities. The instructions were given to all schools and copies were distributed to all teachers.

I liked the idea from the start, since I felt that I had a lot to share with the other teachers about my experience. Without much pondering I decided to conduct an experiment with my pupils and to write a paper describing the whole process from start to finish. Indeed, a creative fever seized my mind and I was sitting up late at night working tirelessly on my project. It was something transcending an ambition or a self-interest that was driving me to work so hard. I felt like my mind was compelling an outflow of creative ideas originating from my knowledge of subject matter and years of experience. My brain was hungry for the mental nourishment and stimulation that I was receiving from this creative work.

No matter how absurd it may sound, in the nightmarish years of Stalin's era, notwithstanding the hard conditions of life, constant material deprivations, moral humiliations, and political censorship, the human intellect was not completely destroyed and the section of the population called intelligentsia that had survived through all of these hardships and impediments was moving forward in all areas of knowledge.

The experimental work with my pupils had the title "How To Teach Seventh Grade Pupils To Write a Composition." As a theme for a composition I selected a politically correct, but factual historical event from the civil war, "A Defense of the Town of Tsarytsyn."<sup>2</sup> I prepared a plan and step-by-step instructions for writing a well-organized composition, and then explained and guided my pupils in their work on this assignment. Pupils were assigned to find materials in the library related to the topic, to read about this historical event, to look at pictures illustrating the battle, and to find the location of the town on the map. In addition, I organized a trip for the whole class to the local Workers Club, where a veteran of this battle shared his battlefield experiences with them.

The pupils were required to write their composition using the information from all these sources following the specific outline for the short story, to use the new words they learned, and to make a picture to illustrate one of the episodes that they described.

My pupils knew that this work would be submitted by me to the Commissariat of People's Education in Kiev and were trying to do their best. We all worked hard and it was worth it. What a great satisfaction I felt reading the well-written compositions and was so happy seeing that my objectives were accomplished with such success. At that moment I became aware that a teacher could have the same deep feelings of accomplishment by seeing the results of her own work, as does an artist, or a poet, or a painter.

I mailed my paper to the Ukrainian Commissariat of People's Education in Kiev. It included a description of the assignment, its planning, step-by-step instructions, and guidance of pupils during the composition process, as well as several of the best compositions by my pupils. I was so sure that my work was well done that it didn't surprise me when I received a notice from the Commissariat that my methodological paper was accepted and that I had been selected as a delegate to the conference. It included the date when I had to arrive in Kiev and all the instructions for the conference and lodging.

I went immediately to the Slavyansk Department of People's Education to notify them about it and to request funds for the trip. Comrade Byelokonye was surprised to see the notice from the Ukrainian Commissariat of People's Education and said to me that he didn't know that anybody from his office had submitted my name as a candidate for this conference. "We will ask for clarification from Kiev and will let you know about our decision," he answered. When the time for the conference was nearing, I went once more to ask about the funds, but this time I was not admitted to the office to see Comrade Byelokonye; instead his secretary told me, "A decision has not been made yet. You will be notified later."

"But I have to be in Kiev in a few days," I insisted.

"Well, I cannot help you in this," she replied. "If you want to go, you will probably have to pay your own way."

And I did just that, I paid for the train ticket myself.

When I arrived in Kiev, I found many delegates to the conference. All was organized very well and we received a schedule of all the events. We were housed in the hotel and all meals were provided for us in the cafeteria. The conference was held in the Palace of the Soviets.

I remember seeing one of the teachers of Russian language from Slavyansk attempting to enter the conference hall, but since he didn't have papers identifying him as a delegate, the ushers did not admit him. Later I found out that Byelokonye had decided to send him instead of me to Kiev and paid for his trip. I was sorry for the teacher because he was an old and respected member of the profession and had a reputation for being a good teacher, but regretfully he hadn't submitted any papers and therefore could not be admitted to the conference as a delegate.

I presented my work to the assembly of the best teachers selected as delegates from the whole Ukraine and my paper was included in a published collection of works of The First All Ukrainian Conference for the Improvement of Professional Skills of Teachers. As a result of participating in this conference, I was elected as a member of

the Branch of the Institute for the Improvement of Professional Skills of the Teachers located in our provincial capital, the city of Stalino, former Yuzovka.

After the conference I was returning with the other delegates to the hotel. We were traveling on the bus to Podol, which would stop near the hotel where we were housed. Like all other teachers, I was still excited about the conference and could hardly observe what was going on around me. Finally, the beautiful Kreshchatik had attracted my attention and I was admiring it through the window.

Suddenly I felt that somebody was very carefully touching me on my shoulder. I turned and saw a woman wearing a gray warm shawl on her head. She was looking at me in a somewhat strange way; I couldn't figure out if she was trying to smile or was ready to cry. Almost at once we both recognized each other and exclaimed, "Ulya!"

"Tonya!"

"What a surprise," I thought, and moved to the seat next to her. To start a conversation I asked her, "Do you live here, Ulya?"

"Yes," she answered, and then added with a quavering voice, "We have moved here quite recently."

"Where have you lived before?"

"We lived in the city of Kharkov." She emitted a deep sigh and added, "You know, I had a big misfortune... Styopa..."

"Yes," I interrupted her, "by the way, how is he?" At that moment I had arrived at my bus stop and moved to the exit door.

Ulya followed me out of the bus like she didn't want me to leave her. "Let's go to this public garden," she suggested, "and let's sit for a while and talk."

We sat on the bench and she recounted to me about her life and about Styopa Bolotov.<sup>3</sup>

"It's hard to talk about it, but now he is all right," she started hesitantly. "But before he was recovering for two years in the Saburova Dacha in Kharkov."

"What happened to him? Why?" I asked her, astonished with such news because I knew that it was an asylum for the insane.

"He became crazy," replied Ulya. And she explained further, "You know, he was unlucky with the revolution, which, he thought, would give him the opportunity to raise himself up. Every time he tried to make something of himself, he could not succeed. He attempted to study and, although I tried to help him, he couldn't make it. Well, finally he tried to work in 'that place', you understand?" And, although there was nobody around us, she whispered, "The KGB. They forced him to do their dirty work 'there.' After several years he couldn't stand it any more and started to talk nonsense... He was imagining all the time that his hands were covered with blood and he was constantly washing them." She stopped and dried her tears.

I asked her, "Is he working now?"

"Yes. Now he works as a master tailor in the tailoring artel<sup>4</sup> and he also teaches young apprentices. He often remembers well about your father. He told me that at least from him he had learned a trade. He repeats often, 'Finally, I have honest and clean work.'"

She looked at me almost calmed after pouring her grief out to somebody who, she thought, could understand her. I was sitting beside her not knowing what to tell her, as in my mind scenes were flash-ing of Styopa and Ulya in my father's home insulting

and humiliating me there. I couldn't feel even the slightest pity for him but I was sincerely sorry for Ulya.

She interrupted the uneasy silence, "And your father, is he still alive?"

"Yes, he lives in Slavyansk again," I emphasized the word "again."

"Well, and how are you, Tonya, where are you living now?"

"I also live in my hometown Slavyansk. I came here for the Teachers' Conference." And gave her a report about my work and proudly said, "Five hundred teachers listened to my teaching experience." I could not stop from telling her how warmly I was greeted by the delegates and about the general excitement at the conference. "I was only sorry that Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev could not come to the conference. It seems that he went to visit *kolkhozes* in the country." Then I added without hiding my pride and trying to brag in front of her about my famous student. "Do you know that he was my student?"

Hesitating and with slight disbelief in her voice Ulya asked, "Oh? Ye-e-s?" Then she added, "They say here in Kiev that this *muzhik* is busying himself and losing no time to mix himself with the mighty clique in Moscow. That he is eager to snap up every opportunity to seize power. They also say that he is pushy, persistent, cunning like a fox, and an artful politician. No wonder they call him 'Cunning Nykyta,'" she said in Ukrainian which sounded funnier than in Russian.

I was not sure at all about how to react to Ulya's sharp comments about Comrade Khrushchev. It sounded to me like she was envious of his political success compared to the failures of her husband Styopa. But you could never be sure if this was not a provocation to make me talk and maybe criticize the communist

leader. After all, she admitted that Styopa had worked for the KGB. I just allowed the topic to come to an end without any comments good or bad, and then got up to leave.

Ulya took my hand and with tears in her eyes told me, "You are a fine woman, Tonya. I am sorry that I offended you the last time I saw you in your father's home. Maybe you still remember that I called you 'rotten intelligentsia...' Well, I was wrong. You made something of yourself, all those years of studying were not lost." I didn't answer anything, but just kissed her on the cheek, and quickly walked toward the hotel across the street. When I was climbing the steps I turned back and saw Ulya still standing near the bench and looking at me.

On my return home I submitted to the Slavyansk Department of People's Education a request for reimbursement of my expenses for the professional trip, documented with the railroad ticket stub and my conference delegate pass stamped by the Ukrainian Commissariat of People's Education. I received reimbursement for all my expenses without any delay and without any questions about the conference.

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1. Antonina G. Gladky, "Uchitel'skaya konferenziya v Kiyevye" [in Russian], *Nikita Khrushchev v moikh vospominaniyakh* [Nikita Khrushchev in My Memoirs], MS, TS, (Manchester, CT, 1967), trans. and ed. Olga Gladky Verro, 1993. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. Civil war between the Reds and the White Russian Army in 1919-1921.

3. See the chapters "My Native Home," "In Whose Name?" and "The Tragic Refuge."

4. A co-operative of artisans.

# True Friendship and First Love

By Olga Gladky Verro

At the end of the summer of 1938 my parents found a small house that was for sale. It was only a two-room house nestled inside a courtyard, but it had a very big fruit garden adjacent to it. It was conveniently located only a few houses from the corner of Kharkovsky Street on the former Railroad Street, which the Soviets had renamed the Street of the Young Communars. On that corner stood the printing house where my father was working as the proofreader<sup>1</sup> of the local newspaper "*Bilshovyk*,"<sup>2</sup> as it was spelled in Ukrainian, because it was printed in that language. The house was also very close to the local railway branch station Bankovskaya, where one could take the local branch train Vyetka to Slavyansk Kurort,<sup>3</sup> a health resort, or to Slavyansk Station, the railway station. At the end of August my parents bought that property and before the beginning of the new school year we moved into our own house.<sup>4</sup>

My parents were enthusiastic about the property, especially about the big fruit garden. But I had my doubts about the value of the fruit garden because it had been completely neglected and resembled a jungle with high grass covering the whole place.

That fall my parents and I worked very hard to bring the fruit garden into good condition. My classes in school were scheduled as in the previous years in the second shift, and my father was working until late at night when the morning newspaper was being prepared for printing. As we were both home in the morning, my father and I spent all our time in the garden; he was pruning the fruit trees and I was pulling the high grass with my bare hands, trying to remove as much of the roots as possible. My mother removed the grass in the afternoon after returning from teaching school. And all three of us were working from early morning until night on the weekends, hoping to bring the garden back into good condition before winter.

It took us a couple of months of intensive work, up to the days when the ground became frozen. By that time the garden was ready for the spring; all trees were neatly pruned, the ground was cleared of grass, the soil was tilled around the trees in large circles, and the tree trunks were painted with slaked lime<sup>5</sup> used as an insect-killing compound. Now, on our days off, my father, mother, and I would walk on the garden alleys proudly admiring our work. I knew that I had worked in the garden as hard as my parents had and, although I was only fifteen-and-half years old, I suddenly felt that I was not a child anymore.

On the first of September, 1938 I went back to school to start the ninth grade. Sometime toward the end of the previous school year,<sup>6</sup> when I got new eyeglasses and could see what was written on the blackboard better, I moved from the desk in the front of the classroom where I was sitting with my friend Syma to sit alone on an empty desk near the window in the cozy corner in the back of the room. There I could be more relaxed than being close to the teacher's desk. During some boring lessons I could read a book, or do some of my homework without being observed by the teachers or by the classmates. But my friend Syma didn't want to wear eyeglasses and couldn't see well on the blackboard; therefore she remained alone in the same second desk in the middle row, where she had sat last year.

As before, Syma and I remained in the pupils brigade with Kostya Syrota. But now Syma and I lived farther from each other, and if she needed my help in doing her homework, she had to come to my house in the morning before going to school; her parents would not allow her to walk alone across the center of the town after dark. From her house she had to walk along Gogol Street, now renamed Karl Marx Street. It lead to, and was bordering one side of the Church Square, now renamed by the communists Lenin Square. The name was very rarely used by the inhabitants of the town because the church building was standing in the middle of it; now it was converted by the Soviets to a movie theater. Usually, in the evening and at night there were people standing in front of it. Some were waiting to enter to see the movie, but some just gathered there to pursue their own interests or to meet others since it was the one place in town where the militiamen would allow such unauthorized gathering.

Although many young people were coming there for socializing, most concerned parents would not allow their children to go there at night; it was known that it was also a gathering place for hooligans and other undesirable elements of the populace. On the way to my house Syma had to walk across the Church Square to the other side, where Lenin Street bordered it. Then she had to turn into Kharkovsky Street, now renamed Taras Shevchenko<sup>7</sup> Street, and to walk until it crossed the railroad tracks and turn into Railroad Street. Then she had to walk to our house, which was not far from that corner. Syma brought some food from home, and after I finish helping her with homework we would have our lunch together before going to school.

One evening, after the school year had already begun, our next-door neighbors came to see me. They were Fanya and her husband Alexandr Vasylyevich, the daughter and the son-in-law of Maria Nikolayevna Ivanova, from whom my parents had bought our house.<sup>8</sup> With them also came a very skinny boy of about my age. Alexandr Vasylyevich introduced the boy, "This is my nephew, Yasha<sup>9</sup> Voronov. He will be living with us and will be attending ninth grade in your school. In the school office they told me that he would be in your class. We came to ask you to do him a great favor. Yasha will need help to catch up with his studies. Fanya and I thought that being a good student and also our neighbor you could help him with his school work."

I replied without hesitation, "Yasha will be placed in our pupils' brigade<sup>10</sup> and we will help him."

Alexandr Vasylyevich looked at Yasha and said, "I told you that Lyalya is a nice girl and that she would agree to help you."

Yasha smiled timidly and nodded his head. And his uncle explained to me, "You see, Yasha is a nice boy from a good family. His father was a devoted revolutionary and was killed in Siberia during the civil war. Yasha was brought up by his mother and until now he has lived with her in another town." Then he hesitated for a moment, as if deciding if he should disclose to me the reason why Yasha had come to live with them. He placed his arm around Yasha's shoulders and frankly admitted, "You see, lately Yasha got in the very bad company of some hooligans and was neglecting his school work. His mother did everything possible to put him on the right track, but was unsuccessful in removing him from the influence of the gang." Alexandr Vasylyevich concluded his explanation, "So, my sister came to seek help from me, her only brother. Fanya and I decided to let my nephew to live with us and give him a chance to continue his education and to graduate from the Ten-Years-School."

After a moment of silence Alexandr Vasylyevich apologetically asked, "Could Yasha walk with you tomorrow to school?"

I replied, "Of course."

"Could you do him one more favor?" he added. "Could you introduce him to some good boys in your class so he shall have a good start?"

"Don't worry, I will introduce him to the boy in our pupils' brigade. He is a very nice boy," I confirmed with reassurance.

The next day Yasha and I walked together to school. He was very shy and I almost had to force him to talk by constantly involving him in conversation. As we arrived at school, the first thing I did was to introduce Yasha to Kostya Syrota, and asked him to introduce the new student to our class. Kostya also introduced Yasha to his school pal Komarsky, with whom he used to go to the physical education equipment room for extra exercises in gymnastics.<sup>11</sup>

As I expected, Yasha was assigned to our pupils' brigade. From that day on Kostya and I began intensively to coach both Yasha and Syma. The three of us, Kostya, Syma, and I would come at about nine o'clock in the morning to Yasha's uncle's apartment in the big house of his mother-in-law Maria Nikolayevna Ivanova.

His uncle and uncle's wife were at work and their small boy was with his grandmother in another part of the house. We had a large room all to ourselves, and there was enough space for all of us to work on the big dining room table. It was a perfect place for us to study. Nobody bothered us and we didn't bother anybody. The only unpleasant thing that bothered me, and probably Syma and Kostya, was to enter through the back door, where some mornings on the porch several uncovered chamber pots full of smelly yellow urine were left. In most families the pots were commonly used during the night since the outhouses were usually located at the far end of the courtyards. But Yasha's aunt sometimes was in a hurry to go to work and didn't have time to remove them.

Kostya and I usually did most of our homework in the evening, and then in the morning we would share in tutoring Yasha and Syma, either one-to-one, or together depending on which subject they needed help with. Both Kostya and I were very good in mathematics, physics, and chemistry and it was rewarding for us to be helpful in tutoring our schoolmates.

Yasha was far behind in all other subjects too and needed extra help in catching up. But Syma didn't need help in the subjects that required only memorization of facts, dates, and names.

Sometimes all four of us would study together such subjects as history, literature, grammar, German, or geography by reading aloud and answering the questions at the end of the chapters in the textbooks. It was less boring and even fun to study in a group and we really had a good time. Kostya contributed a lot to keeping all of us in a good mood with his wit and humor, finding the funny side in the most boring moments. Being in friendly company, Yasha slowly lost some of his shyness and revealed his gentle and pliable nature.

Kostya and Syma brought food for lunch, which we had before going to school. Kostya would stay and eat with Yasha, while Syma and I would go to eat in my house just across the row of the lilac bushes that bordered our and Maria Ivanovna's courtyards. Then the four of us would walk to school together, joking, laughing, and

having a lot of fun.

This happy friendship between the two boys and the two girls didn't go unnoticed by one of the nasty girls in our class. She probably found it very strange because most of the pupils' brigades were either all boys or all girls. The girl was Olga Krasnaya, whom I already knew from the sixth grade. In the seventh grade she became the ringleader of a small clique of girls that were under her malign influence. The girls in Olga Krasnaya's clique also belonged to the same pupils' brigade and many of them were between borderline and average pupils. These girls were always engaged in criticizing, faultfinding, and picking on the others. I detested them for this and Syma and Kostya felt the same. Yasha didn't know them well yet, but he believed that the opinions of all three of his friends should be true.

Olga Krasnaya became jealous that our brigade came up with good ratings in overall grades, in attendance, and in discipline, which were graphed on the wall chart where the progress of all pupils' brigades in our class were reported. She became suspicious of our happy friendship and began to gossip about the relationship between Kostya, Yasha, Syma, and me by inventing all kinds of hard-to-believe amorous intrigues among us. For some unknown reason, she selected among the four of us to pick on me and did it usually when Kostya and Yasha were not nearby. Several times I had verbal quarrels with her and I was getting tired of this nonsense. One day during the long recess between classes as she began to pick on me again, I raised my voice so all the other classmates could hear me, and told her with contempt, "From now on you can yap like a dog as much as you want but I won't answer you, or talk back to you, ever! For me you don't exist anymore!" Surprisingly, it produced the desired effect and she stopped bothering me. From that day on I ignored her completely. I would walk by her not paying any attention to her, as if she were invisible and for a long time I did not talk to her.

My friends Syma, Kostya, and Yasha approved of how I resolved this problem. Kostya sometimes liked to tease Olga Krasnaya by purposely making her curious about what kind of friendly rapport we had. He used several tricks to do that. When she was nearby, Kostya would give me a small note saying loud enough for her to hear, "Read this and tell me if you like it." Other times he would come close to me and to Syma and call, "Yasha, come here, I have something to tell all of you." Then, when we would come close, he would whisper to us, "Pay attention how Olga Krasnaya is watching us. Oh, how she would like to know what I am telling you." And he would loudly add, "Good, I am glad that you all agree with me!" All four of us would laugh as if he had really told us something funny or secret.

This support by Kostya, Yasha, and Syma had a very powerful effect on my appreciation of the true friendship that I cherished and shared with my friends. Our genuine friendship was reinforced by the close cooperation and the worthy purpose to which the four of us devoted ourselves. In helping our teammates Kostya and I gained mutual esteem for each other's abilities in learning and for our skills in teaching our friends. We both knew that Syma and Yasha sincerely appreciated our efforts that helped them to have passing grades in the subjects that were very difficult for them to master. All four of us were sure that we could depend on each other for help on any occasion, and this complete trust bonded our friendship more than anything else.

In my friendship with Kostya, it was important that neither he nor I had romantic expectations of each other. Kostya was a very handsome boy with dark brown eyes that

emitted a magnetic glow, which infused warmth and transmitted buoyant cheerfulness. He had a lively personality and a sense of humor that he abundantly bestowed especially on Syma, teasing her and making her blush.

Many girls in our class would have wished to have him not only as a friend, but also as a sweetheart, as was the case with my girlfriend Syma. But I never allowed myself to even think about him as more than a friend because his friendship was very important for me. I also knew that he was romantically involved with a girl who lived in his neighborhood. He never talked about her, and I wasn't prying into his affairs of heart and didn't tell anyone about it, not even to Syma which allowed her to hope for his love. I also never told her that Kostya's parents were divorced and that he had transferred to our school because his last name had been changed from Zaytsev to Syrota. I knew about this from my father, who had Kostya as a pupil when he was teaching in the Shnurkovsky School. I felt that Kostya appreciated my discretion and respected me for keeping his secret.

At the same time I didn't keep it a secret from my friends that I liked Sergey Kairov, another new boy that arrived in our ninth grade class that year. Hence, Kostya and I were truly sincere friends in the full sense. Yasha was also a very devoted friend whose respect, loyalty, and sincerity were unquestionable. If he had any senti-mental feelings toward me, he certainly didn't show it, knowing that I was in love with Sergey. This pure friendship with the two boys gave me a real sense of security, respect, and attention that as a teenage girl I needed to have from the boys at that time. I enjoyed the friendships, which were open, clear, and straightforward, without any entanglements or demands that tender feelings or an infatuation could have imposed.

But my infatuation with Sergey Kairov was not as simple to define and to handle emotionally. Sergey came to our class also in 1938, but much later than Yasha. His family came to Slavyansk from the town of Kharkov. I liked him very much from the beginning.

Sergey proudly considered himself a poet. From the first days after his arrival, he began to show his talent by writing poetry for our class wall-newspaper, edited by the pupils under the guidance of our teacher of Russian language and literature, Anna Nikolayevna Shmulyevich. She immediately brought to the attention of the class that she had read many of Sergey's poems and considered him to be an aspiring poet.

Sergey was very reserved and kept himself apart from the other pupils, boys or girls. The only one with whom he had some kind of relationship was Fimka Zusmanovich, with whom he began to collaborate in editing the class wall-newspaper.

Overall, Sergey behaved himself as if he were culturally and intellectually superior compared to the other students in our class, especially in literature and history. And it was very obvious that he was well-read in those subjects because he always raised his hand and elaborately answered the teacher's questions with more details than our teachers had given us in their lessons, or what was written in our textbooks.

Most boys, including Kostya, considered him to be a snob because of his habit of showing-off in class, and also because he had more refined manners than they had. But from the time Kostya found out that I had romantic feelings toward Sergey, he kept his opinions to himself and respected my right to privacy in heart matters, as I did with his.

But I couldn't see the faults that the others saw in Sergey. I was infatuated with the inner nature of this exceptional boy and fell madly in love with him. I admired his

refined manners, the dignity, and self-assurance in expressing himself. His physical appearance was secondary in importance for me; however, I considered him to be handsome. He was slender, but not of athletic build, and of average height for a boy of his age. He was always dressed neatly in clothes of better quality than it was common for the boys in our little provincial town. His gray eyes looked calm, pensive, and serious, as if he were concentrating on something beyond what was going on around him. He had dark blond hair that he kept well-combed back, leaving his forehead open to dominate over the other features of his face.

Of course, Sergey didn't even suspect about my tender feelings for him and I didn't dare reveal them to him. My friend Syma was glad that I finally fell in love. She was always afraid that by being so close to Kostya every day and having such a strong friendship, I might fall in love with him and become her rival. She was very sympathetic to my love for Sergey and consoled me, "I have been in love with Kostya for three years, and I am happy just to have him close by and to see his beautiful brown eyes, his smiling face, and to hear his ringing voice."

"Yes," I would reply, "you are with Kostya every morning when we are studying and walking to school together. And he knows that you are in love with him. But I don't dare let Sergey know about my feelings; he doesn't even know that I exist."

"But he keeps himself superior to all in our class and doesn't get close to anyone, not just you," she consoled me.

I was so influenced by Sergey's poetical talent that I began to experiment with writing poetry and was hoping that this could bring us closer together. Once I wrote a short poem that seemed to me to be quite good and well rhymed. During one long recess when Sergey was sitting at his desk reviewing the lesson in the textbook, I approached him and with trepidation in my heart dared to ask his opinion of my poetry. He received my request with some curiosity and quickly browsed through my creation. After reading it, he replied very coldly without any consideration of my feelings, "It is not poetry; it's only an ordinary verse. To write true poetry one should have talent; it is not enough to rhyme the words." He handed the page back to me and resumed reading the textbook without any other comments.

Humiliated and ashamed from hearing such sharp criticism, I silently retreated to my desk. I was very upset and felt like a complete failure; I was wounded both in my pride and in my feelings toward Sergey. Disheartened, I sat at my desk in the corner of the classroom for the rest of the school day without paying any attention to the lessons and brooding over Sergey's indifference toward me.

For a few weeks I felt sad and depressed; however, my sentimental feelings for him remained unchanged. It just became clear to me that there was very little hope that my love could be reciprocated. Sitting undisturbed in the back of the classroom, I could see Sergey's back and sometimes his profile and occasionally dream about how happy I would be if one day he would notice me and maybe even like me. Some other times I would think, "Why did I fall in love with Sergey and not with any of the other boys in my class?" I would look at some of them sitting at their desks<sup>1</sup> and consider their good and bad points and ask myself, "Why not that boy?... And why not that one?" And I couldn't find the answer.

I looked at Vadim Doytchev, who was sitting on the first desk in the first row near the door. He was tall, well-built, handsome, blond, and fair-skinned, with blue eyes and

an open, smiling friendly face. He had a good lively character and liked to joke and make fun. He was intelligent, but he didn't apply himself much to schoolwork and excelled only in gymnastics.

Sitting a few desks farther in the same row was the Jewish boy Ruvka<sup>12</sup> Litvinov. Although he was short compared to the other boys of his age, he was well-proportioned, agile, and had wavy dark brown hair and brown eyes. He was smart, quick-witted, and a good pupil.

Another Jewish boy who sat toward the end of the first row in front of Kostya Syrota who occupied the last desk, was Vovka<sup>13</sup> Dobry. He was the tallest in our class, maybe in the whole school. He also had everything else complementing his height, very long arms, hands, fingers, legs, face, and nose. He wore large round eyeglasses and looked much older than the other boys in our class. Vovka was a grandson of the director of the town's orphanage, and because of this he gave himself airs of importance. He seemed to be intelligent, but he didn't apply himself much to study and was content to be an average student. He had the latest model photo camera of a very good quality and he dedicated himself to photography; that was his hobby to which he allotted most of his time. He was always taking pictures of pupils in our class and was considered to be a photo-correspondent for our class wall-newspaper.

In front of Vovka Dobry sat Fimka<sup>14</sup> Zusmanovich, also a Jewish boy with whom I studied in the fifth grade when I imagined being in love with him. But it didn't last for long. He was vain and insensitive to the feelings of others and this trait quickly dissipated my infatuation.

Yasha Pewsner, the red-cheeked, fat, and clumsy Jewish boy, sat in the middle row, a few desks behind Syma Shyrman, and behind Yasha Voronov. Yasha Pewsner didn't study well because of both low intelligence and lack of effort in applying himself to schoolwork. He gained the attention of pupils and teachers by being the clown in our class.

In the middle row behind Yasha Pevsner was sitting Sergey Kairov, and behind him another Jewish boy, whom everybody called just by his last name Kogan. He was of average height and built was always polite and serious diligent student.

With so many nice boys in my class I didn't find anyone to be as exceptional as Sergey who captivated my heart. I shared with Syma about my unhappiness and continued to pour my feelings of love, hope, and despair into the verses, as Sergey would have called them, but of course, I didn't dare to show them to Sergey or even to my friends Yasha and Kostya, and only Syma admired them.

I am sure, that at that time nobody in our class even suspected about my infatuation with Sergey.

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1. See the chapter "The Newspaper's Proofreader."

2. Spelled "*Bolshevik*" in Russian.

3. The health resort.

4. See the chapter "A Fight for Our Garden."

5. Calcium hydroxide.

6. See the chapter "The New Ten-Years-School in Slavyansk."

7. The popular Ukrainian poet who described in his poetry the hard life of the peasants during the serfdom.

8. See the chapter "A Fight for Our Garden."

9. Nickname for Yakov.
10. See the chapter "The New Ten-Years-School in Slavyansk"
11. Ibid.
12. Nickname for Ruvim.
13. Nickname for Vladimir. From photographs of the groups of pupils made by Vovka (Vladimir) Dobry.
14. Nickname for Yefim.

## Becoming Conscious Of My Political Views

By Olga Gladky Verro

During my childhood and early teen years I perceived from my father the emotionally charged clues about the bad people and the wrong actions that were connected with them. My mother always reminded my father to be careful that I wouldn't hear his angry outbursts such as "That damned Communist is trying to get rid of me!" or his resentful accusations such as "Those red devil Bolsheviks have destroyed our poor Russia!" Or his unfavorable comments such as, "This detested Soviet system!" Or his bitter complaints such as, "Those hated NKVD dogs are again on my trail."

But my father was not always successful in concealing these things, especially when he was very upset with somebody or with some event. I wanted to know what was bothering him and would carefully listen to what he was telling my mother in a very subdued voice when I was already in bed and they believed that I was asleep. Very slowly his opinions and beliefs took hold in my developing mind and I began to form some perceptions of "who" and "what" was bad or evil. But I also knew that I should not talk about these things with anybody because it would hurt my father.

Then, when I was in the ninth grade, I suddenly became aware of my political opinions that not surprisingly were in accord with my father's views. A very unusual event happened during the second half of the year and interrupted the monotony of the school days. One day our ninth grade and tenth grade classes were gathered for the meeting on the second floor assembly hall. At that time most of the pupils in our class were between sixteen and seventeen years old. This was the age at which the Communist Party was intensively recruiting youth to become members of the Komsomol.<sup>1</sup> On the stage at the table covered with a red cloth sat our School Director, the Communist comrade Malikova, and one young man who seemed to be only a few years older than the pupils of the tenth grade class.

Comrade Malikova got up from the chair and presented the young man to us, "Pupils of the ninth and tenth grade classes, this is Comrade Nikolay Dyeryuzhkin, the Komsomol organizer, who was appointed by the Regional Komsomol Committee as the secretary of the Komsomol cell of our Ten-Years-School Number 15."

Comrade Dyeryuzhkin got up and waved in his raised right hand the red Komsomol membership card. He began a propaganda speech consisting of the standard communist slogans and exaltations of the deeds of the Bolsheviks. He concluded his speech with the call to all of us, "Our beloved Communist Party expects

all Soviet youth to join the ranks of the young communists who are the vanguard of young builders of Communism! I am sure that all of you are eager to become members of the Komsomol and to proudly hold the Komsomol membership card." And in a sweeping slow motion he waved the red card several times, as if he wanted to be sure that everybody could see it. Then he added with a reassuring voice, "I will be sitting here at the table all afternoon to register new members. Anyone who is ready to register now may come to the stage, and those who need to be in class may feel free to ask your teachers any time to allow you to come here to register."

The school director had adjourned the meeting. Some pupils from the tenth grade went up right away onto the stage and formed a line to register. But the majority of the pupils just stood in small groups talking in unusually subdued voices. I saw my friend Zoya Litvinova<sup>2</sup> standing with her friends and classmates from the tenth grade class, Musya<sup>3</sup> Revsina and Olga Chernyavskaya.<sup>4</sup> I told Syma, "Let's join them and listen what they are saying."

They were commenting that since they were graduating at the end of this school year it was very important for them to be members of the Komsomol to increase their chances for acceptance into the institutes<sup>5</sup> of their choice. It was known that in addition to academic achievement and the entrance exams competition, membership in the Komsomol was a very important factor that was considered for admission into the prestigious institutions of higher learning.

Zoya said that she would first talk about it with her mother and with her boyfriend Zhenya<sup>6</sup> Kozyryev. Olga Chernyavskaya also said that she should seek the opinion of her parents and her boyfriend David Gorelik.

As I was listening to their comments, it flashed through my mind, *I would never become a member of Komsomol. Never!* But, of course, I knew that I couldn't tell this to anybody. Already deeply imbedded in my mind were my father's not too subtle expressions about the evils of the Communist Party. I couldn't tell them that membership in the organization affiliated with the Communist Party was against my principles. I just made a neutral comment, "I have almost two years ahead of me before applying for admission to the institute and have plenty of time to think about it." Syma nodded her head, agreeing with my idea.

On the stage I saw several of my classmates standing in line, waiting to be registered. Among the first in line were the two girlfriends Raya<sup>7</sup> Kyrychenko and Valya<sup>8</sup> Lysykhina; they were inseparable friends and in the classroom they also sat together at the same desk in the row near the windows. Also farther in line were the two girlfriends Raya Gunicheva<sup>9</sup> and Lora<sup>10</sup> Krylova, and next to them were the two girls belonging to the obnoxious clique, their ringleader Olga Krasnaya<sup>11</sup> and one of her closest followers, Sonya<sup>12</sup> Tryet'yakova. Of course, one couldn't miss the tall Vovka Dobry, who was taking photographs of the special event for our class wall-newspaper. I couldn't see any boys from our class standing in line at that time.

Although Kostya, Yasha, and Syma were my friends, we never talked among ourselves about politics at all. I didn't dare express to them my disdain for the Communist Party or for the Komsomol membership because I learned very early in my childhood that talking about it could hurt my father and mother. And I knew that Yasha's father used to be a revolutionary; I didn't know anything about Kostya's father and mother's political affiliations. At that time neither of them joined the Komsomol right

away, but both of them eventually joined the organization. Later when the question about my membership came up, I just told them the same neutral explanation—that I had plenty of time to make that decision.

After a few days comrade Dyeryuzhkin ordered the first meeting of the Komsomol cell of the Ten-Years-School Number 15. At that meeting the secretaries of the Komsomol cells of each class were elected, and Raya Kyrychenko was elected as a secretary of our Ninth Grade class. After being elected, she began to behave as if she was a very important person and spoke with the pupils with the authority bestowed on her by the Komsomol. She began to make the usual Communist Party propaganda to recruit more pupils to become members of the Komsomol. She was successful at that time in convincing some of the boys and girls to join, including the two cousins Musya<sup>13</sup> Davidenko and Lena<sup>14</sup> Tarasenko, who sat at the desk in front of her.

Before this happened, I admired Raya Kyrychenko very much for her dignified demeanor and because, although she had an exclusive friend Valya Lysykhina, she was always friendly with most pupils in our class, although she didn't give too much confidence to anybody. She behaved and appeared more mature than the other girls in our class. I considered her to be pretty. Her face was nicely adorned by neat, medium-length hair of a dark brown shade, which she styled with light waves. She always wore outfits without frills, a straight skirt, and classic shirts that were neatly ironed and varied in color. At some point in my experiments in writing poetry I wrote an ode addressed to her that elevated her as an example of impeccable character and appearance. She was very pleased with my verse but didn't change her behavior toward me. However, after she became the secretary of the Komsomol cell of our ninth grade class and had changed her behavior by acting as an authority in her activity of recruiting the new members, I was disappointed with her and she lost, in my eyes, that aura I had attributed to her earlier.

In the spring of 1939 our garden was in full bloom and sometimes before going to school my friends Syma, Yasha, Kostya, and I would go there to enjoy its beauty and admire the wonder of nature. We often did our homework outside on our porch near the cherry tree that was covered with white blossoms and the flowering bushes of lilac emanating a strong bitter fragrance.

At the end of the school year Kostya and I were very proud of having succeeded in tutoring our friends Syma and Yasha, who both passed the final exams of the ninth grade. We said good-bye to Kostya, who said that he was going somewhere on vacation. But I knew he was going to stay with his father for the summer because his parents were divorced when he was in the sixth grade. Yasha was also going to visit his mother. Syma and I agreed that we would, as in the previous summers, go to Kurort to enjoy the sandy beach and the water of the Salty Lake on those days when I didn't have the mud therapy that I had for many years. Now I had also mud applications on my legs that had bothered me with pain in the winter.

With our garden we had a great disappointment. The boys from the town orphanage had discovered our garden and begun to vandalize it by breaking the branches; later, as the small green fruits began to appear, they began to tear them and, after biting into the sour fruits, throw them away. My mother went to the local *Militsia* headquarters asking for the apprehension of the vandals. Their answer was, "It is not our job to protect private property. Hire a watchman!" My father decided to build a brick

fence around the garden. And as the mason was building the fence for the rest of the summer, and we were planting our vegetable garden at the far end of our property near the water hole formed from the accumulation of rainwater, the vandals had to stay away from it. We also watched the garden in the evening.

All through the summer we had plenty of vegetables and fruits not only for us but also for my grandfather and my uncle Igor's family. In the fall we had a good harvest of vegetables and fruits of all kinds. I helped my mother make pickled tomatoes, cucumbers, and cabbage and we stored them in the cellar.

There we also stored our potatoes, heads of cabbage, beets, carrots, onions, and garlic for the whole winter. The cobs of dry corn to feed our poultry and the sunflower seeds we stored in the attic, and the pumpkins we stored under our beds. As the fruits were maturing, my mother made all kinds of preserves that we also stored on the shelves in the cellar. We had enough provisions to last until the next summer. And we gave lots of fruits to my grandfather and my uncle Igor, who came with his whole family to gather fruits from the trees. My cousins Nanychka and Fredik had lots of fun and my aunt also made a good provision of preserves.

That summer my father decided to make a short visit to the family of his late cousin Bonifaty Yuryevich, who lived in the town of Taganrog in the same house that belonged to my father's aunt Marusya.<sup>15</sup> He took me with him to get to know my second cousins: Konstantin, whom we called by the nickname Kotik, and who was only one year older than I, and his much younger sister Lyudmila.

We stayed there only a few days and, while my father was visiting with Bonifaty's wife, my cousin Kotyk showed me the old center of the town and its park. As we were walking or sitting on the bench, we were getting acquainted with each other since we had met only once when we were very small children. He complained that he didn't get along with his mother and explained, "It's very hard because we have the same personality; we are both very stubborn and don't give up easily." The next day my father, Kotyk, Lyudmila, and I went to the shore of the Azov Sea, where my father made a photograph of the three of us. Our visit was short but it was memorable for me because I liked my cousins and enjoyed their company. And Kotik gave me his photograph, which I cherished.

In the summer of 1939 shortly after we arrived from our trip to Taganrog, the saga of fighting for our garden began. The local department of education had decided to expropriate it from us and to annex it to the Elementary School No. 6, which bordered our property.<sup>16</sup> There was a nerve-wracking tension in our family because my mother stubbornly refused to give up the land. At that time I didn't know that the property was purchased in the name of my mother to ensure that it would not be confiscated in case my father was arrested for his "sins" of serving in the White Army during the civil war. My mother wouldn't listen to the advice of my father and stubbornly refused to give up her garden even after the inquiry by the Provincial Executive Committee in Stalino<sup>17</sup> and their decision to take from us not all, but a large part of our garden. Not knowing at that time that my father feared an inquiry into his past and the reprisals that could follow, I was very surprised that he argued with my mother and tried to convince her not to fight the Soviet authorities. Not being aware of my father's past, I supported my mother's position of not giving up even a part of our garden.

At the last moment my mother came up with the idea of writing a letter to her

former student Nikita Khrushchev, who was at that time First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine. She asked him to help her if, in her case, the law exempting expropriation of cultivated gardens could be applied.

Meanwhile the vandals from the orphanage were systematically demolishing the newly built brick fence around our garden.

We took turns staying in the garden during the rest of the summer. But as soon as the schools started and we couldn't watch or garden during the day, the vandals managed to destroy the whole brick fence, leaving only remnants of the fence and piles of broken bricks and mortar delineating the perimeter of the garden.

At the same time, the destruction of the fruit trees continued until snow covered the ground and footprints could have led to the culprits. It was clear that someone in the local government had decided to completely destroy our garden as revenge and was sending the orphans to do the dirty job. It was obvious that someone directed this; the demolition was progressing at a very rapid pace requiring coordinated group work and the use of heavy tools to pound the bricks.

Then late in the fall my mother was called to the office of the local department of education and received the answer that they had renounced the expropriation of our garden. My mother came home and said, "Nikita Khrushchev helped!"<sup>18</sup> It was a bitter victory for my mother. Our garden was completely destroyed. We even stopped going there to see further damage, because it was a pitiful sight—all those beautiful trees with the savagely broken branches. It was breaking our hearts to see all that devastation.

During the saga of fighting for our garden my parents were so outraged about the Soviet system, and by the abuse of power by the Soviet officials who were the members of the Communist Party, which my father cursed, "Those damned Bolsheviks sitting in the local governmental offices." My mother complained about the orphanage personnel who didn't watch the boys. Both of them forgot completely to be careful that I wouldn't hear them and talked aloud and openly in my presence, which was unusual for them. This further reinforced my political views because I could see with my own eyes that my parents were right in their hate and disappointment with the Bolsheviks and with the Soviet system of government.

This was a period when Germany was already making the conquests of the *blitzkrieg* in Europe. And in the Soviet Union there was a general air of paranoia about spies and traitors. The NKVD,<sup>19</sup> a successor to the GPU, was active in arresting "suspected" individuals who were disappearing without any trials or explanations. The two brothers of my uncle Igor's wife were arrested because of their German origin, written in their passports as their nationality, and their last name "Gauk."

In the Soviet newspapers were reports about the massive purge of traitors and spies from the ranks of the Red Army officers. Soviet newspapers controlled by the Central Committee of the Communist Party were filled with propaganda slogans against the generalized, not specifically defined, "capitalist aggressors," "fascists," and "imperialists." The Soviet press was presenting the idea that all capitalist countries were against the socialist Soviet Union, and the articles were very ambiguous in reporting the events that were going on in Europe.

My father worked in the local newspaper "*Bilshovyk*" as a proofreader. The editor-in-chief, the Communist Mukhin, got into a habit of delegating writing the editorials to my father. He was giving him the "politically correct" instructions on what those articles

had to include. My father would come home and disdainfully comment, "Every day they are changing how to present the situation abroad. It is no wonder that in reading the newspapers, people are confused about who are the enemies of the Soviet Union."

Indeed, for some time "fascists" was the stereotype name used in describing the enemies of our country. Then, after the nonaggression pact was made between Stalin and Hitler in August of 1939, suddenly the name "fascists" was not used as commonly as before in the newspapers, while the terms "imperialists" and "capitalist aggressors" remained in describing the evil forces that were ready to attack the "peace-loving" Soviet Union.

The Stalin-Hitler nonaggression pact surprised and puzzled Soviet citizens, and they were even more perplexed that the Soviet press didn't condemn the partial invasion of Western Poland by Germany. But the population was astonished by Stalin's sudden and unexpected attack on Poland in September 1939. Recently overrun by the Germans, Poland couldn't sustain the fight against the Red Army and was conquered in one month. The annexation of the Eastern part of Poland by the Soviet Union was applauded in the Soviet newspapers and presented to the citizens not as an act of aggression, but as a legitimate takeover of land that had belonged to Russia in the past and as a liberation of Ukrainian people living there from Polish capitalist oppression.

The overall preparedness for the war against the "capitalist aggressors" without naming any particular European state, was a dominant theme in the newspapers, schools, and factories. In our school the military education<sup>20</sup> instructor made us march in the schoolyard and practice using the gas masks. He repeated over and over the official Communist Party slogans that saturated the newspapers and were placed on placards on the walls in the school hall. All this created the general atmosphere that the Soviet Union might eventually be involved in the war.

That year between September and October, Stalin "persuaded" the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to sign "mutual assistance" pacts that gave the Soviet Union the right to station troops, aircraft, and naval units on their territory, resulting in their de facto annexation to the USSR. Territorial concessions were also demanded from Finland who was not as eager as its neighbors to comply with Stalin's demands.

At the end of November my father came home and told us about the official news that was printed in the morning newspaper. The Soviet government was accusing the Finnish Armed Forces of making provocations on the Soviet border. My father commented, "Can you believe that a small country like Finland would provoke incidents with the Soviet Union? Lies, lies, all they know how to print is lies! How could one believe what this Communist press is telling their citizens? It is clear that Stalin gave an order to start the war. He wants to grab some land before Hitler does."

On November 30, 1939 an official announcement appeared in the Soviet newspapers stating that the Soviet forces had to defend the Soviet borders by responding to the provocations of the "Finnish capitalist aggressors," who started the war on behalf of unnamed "imperialist powers." The war with Finland was fought during that winter. At some point the Soviet press reported that the Finnish people had created their own democratic government, which was friendly to the Soviet Union, and that the Red Army was going to liberate the Finnish proletariat by the request of this new government.

Contrary to this official news, rumors were that the Finns were fighting hard and

that there were many casualties among the Soviet troops, that the Red Army was unprepared to fight during the harsh winter, and that the firing squads and the commissars were forcing the men to fight. But the Soviet press reported only the victories of the Red Army and they exaggerated numbers of losses by the Finns. When the war continued all through the winter, the Soviet press began to print the excuses that severe climate, terrain covered with thick forest, and help from “other capitalist countries” were prolonging the war. Rumors were that the hospitals in Leningrad were filled with wounded and frostbitten Soviet soldiers and that schools and factories were being used to treat the wounded. In the middle of March, 1940 Finland signed a peace agreement with the Soviet Union giving up a sizable part of land bordering Karelian Soviet Socialist Republic, but did not concede sovereignty as its Baltic neighbors did.

All this was discussed in our home between my father and his brother Igor and I was warned not to talk about it to anybody. I proudly asserted that I was aware of this and that they should not worry about me. But for me this was the next step in my political convictions and in learning about the hypocrisy and lies that the Soviet government was telling its people.

All this was happened during my tenth and last year in the Ten-Years-School. Until that year I didn't consciously perceive the larger picture of what was going on in the country. I only knew that my father didn't like the Soviet government and the Communist Party and knew that I could not talk to anybody about it because it would harm him and my mother.

Then suddenly I became aware that the whole country was controlled and manipulated by the Communist Party; that the NKVD arrested people without giving them a chance to defend themselves; that the Soviet bureaucrats were mostly members of the Communist Party, and they abused their power over the ordinary people, who just wanted to be left alone to live their lives. And I knew that I didn't like this Soviet system, but there was nothing I could do about it. I knew I had to adapt myself if I wanted to live in peace. I knew that I had to keep my thoughts and beliefs secret because no one could speak against the Communist Party, against Stalin, against the Soviet government without being called “the enemy of the people” and be grabbed by the NKVD in the middle of the night and disappear without a trace.

I knew that the newspapers were printing lies about what was going on in our country and abroad. But the truth was not possible to find out. However, one could guess that it was just the opposite of what one read in the newspapers. It was like living in two worlds, one, the real one that could be seen and heard, and the other one, the make-believe world that the Communist Party was describing in their propaganda, slogans, and articles about the “happy life” of the peasants and workers who labored for the glory of the Communist Party and the Soviet state.

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1. Komsomol - acronym for *Kommunistichesky Soyuz Molodyezhy* - The Young Communists League for youth 16 years and older.

2. A daughter of Mariya Sergeyevna Litvinova, childhood friend of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and her sister Tatyana.

3. The nickname for Maria.

4. See the chapter “The Years Under the German Occupation.”

5. Colleges.

6. The nickname for Yevgyeny.

7. Nickname for Raissa.
8. Nickname for Valentina.
9. From the preserved school photographs by Vovka Dobry.
10. Nickname for Larissa.
11. From the preserved school photographs
12. Nickname for Sofia. From the school photographs.
13. Nickname for Maria
14. Nickname for Yelena.
15. See the chapter "Mariya Vikentyevna Mikhnevich and the Yurevich Family."
16. From the property plan.
17. See the chapter "A Fight for Our Garden." And "The Resolution of the Presidium of Stalino's Provincial Executive Committee."
18. See the chapter: "A Fight for Our Garden."
19. NKVD – acronym for *NarodnyKommissaiat Vnutrennikh Del* – Popular Commissariat of Internal Affairs.
20. From the school photograph.

## The Last Year Of School

By Olga Gladky Verro

In September 1939 I began my last year of secondary school in the tenth grade. Not much had changed in our class from the years before. Syma, Kostya, Yasha, and I remained in the same pupils' brigade and our routine of studying in the morning in Yasha's uncle's apartment continued,<sup>1</sup> but Kostya and I were working even harder now. We needed to have the best grades in all subjects for the entrance applications, for me in the Institute, and for Kostya in the Naval Military Academy. I had already decided that I would select the engineering field but was not sure yet in what area of specialization. My father was suggesting the field of chemistry and my uncle Igor was advocating electrical engineering. I was more inclined toward the latter because my teacher of physics made his subject very interesting while the chemistry teacher, Comrade Malikova, who was also the director of our school, made it so boring that it didn't appeal to me. Besides, in physics my grades were always "Excellent", while in chemistry only "Good."

That year soon after the school started I had a big disappointment because Sergey Kairov suddenly left our town without saying good-bye to anybody but Fimka Zusmanovich, to whom he gave his new address and asked him to give his address to anyone in our class who wanted to write to him. He informed Fimka that his father had been transferred to the town of Lvov in the Western Ukraine, recently annexed to the Soviet Union from Poland.<sup>2</sup> He explained that he would be staying with his aunt in Kharkov temporarily.

I took the initiative and wrote him a short letter right away asking him if he wanted to correspond with me. To my great surprise, he answered, but his answer was mailed together with the letter to Fimka on his address. Fimka announced to the whole class that Sergey was sending his greetings to everybody and then he loudly called me, "Olga, I have the answer to your letter from Sergey. Come and get it!" I was mortified by

such insensitivity and indiscretion of both boys, Fimka's by announcing it to the whole class, and Sergey's by sending the answer to my letter to Fimka, when I had given him my own address.

Before the winter school vacations began we exchanged a couple of postcards with a few lines describing what we were doing and ending it with simple greetings. He usually was late in answering my letters, but I was happy because after I asked him to send the answers to my home address, which he did, I had more communications with him than before in person when he was in my class.

That year Kostya Syrota and I decided to write the story of our class. We divided our work so each of us would write chapters about the pupils and events we were most familiar with and then we would read each other's writing and make suggestions or additions and return it for further editing.

Since both of us were sitting on the last desks in opposite corners of the classroom and no one was sitting at the last desk in the middle row, we would pass our writing to each other during the lessons by placing it on the seat of the middle desk and the other would take it, read it, and give it back. We were careful that the teacher should not see us, but it did not go unnoticed by the pupils sitting in the back of the classroom, especially Fimka Zusmanovich and Vovka Dobry, who were bursting with curiosity to know what Kostya and I were doing.

All the news about the war with Finland and the possibility that it could indeed become a bigger conflict was on our minds<sup>3</sup> when Kostya and I were planning the chapters. We specially wanted to include what would happen to some of our pupils if the war started. We agreed on the imaginary scenario that would involve Olga Krasnaya and the girls from her clique, who would become the traitors, because we could not think of anyone else in our class who would do such thing.

My infatuation with Sergey had become even more intense now that I was corresponding with him, and I decided that it was possible for me to see him. I asked my parents to allow me during the winter vacation to visit my aunt Nyusya,<sup>4</sup> who lived in the city of Kharkov. My mother was strongly against allowing me to travel alone at my age. But my father convinced her that I would be seventeen years old in January, and that in the summer I would have to travel somewhere alone to take the entrance examinations for the Institute; he thought this trip would be good practice for me.

I reasoned with my mother that I had been with her in Kharkov before and knew the center of the city and the neighborhood where my aunt lived. At the end, my father and I prevailed. My mother explained in a letter to my aunt that during the summer I would not have time to enjoy the vacation, because I would have to prepare myself for the entrance examinations for the Institute. She said my visit to Kharkov was their present for my good grades and in anticipation of my successful graduation from the Ten-Years-School.

During the winter vacation I arrived without incident in Kharkov. My uncle Petya<sup>5</sup> met me at the rail station and accompanied me to my aunt Nyusya, who had shared an apartment with one couple for many years. She lived in one small room and shared the kitchen and the bathroom with them.

I notified Sergey in advance that during the winter school vacation I would be in Kharkov and told him that I would visit him. Since my aunt was working and my uncle was attending the Architectural Technicum during the day, I took the streetcar to the

center of the city and visited the *Lux* store, to admire the merchandise—as in an exotic museum—not available in the stores of our provincial town. And everything was sold at such exuberant prices that I was wondering, “Who can afford to buy these things?”

On the second day after my arrival, I told my aunt that I would visit one of the pupils from my class who had moved to Kharkov. I went to visit Sergey in the morning and arrived there sometime after nine o’clock. A corpulent woman who told me that she was Sergey’s aunt greeted me. To my surprise he was still asleep and she had to wake him up. While I was waiting, she complained to me about the high price of food in the big city and asked me lots of questions about how much some of the groceries and other food and vegetables cost in our provincial town. I told her that I really didn’t know much about the prices because most of the vegetables and fruits we cultivated ourselves in our garden, and it was my mother who purchased all other food.

I noted that his aunt lived in a big apartment located in one wing of an old but beautiful building that probably had formerly belonged to some rich family. They didn’t share it with anyone else, a luxury that was affordable only for high-ranking Soviet bureaucrats or party bosses. The apartment was well furnished and obviously Sergey had his own room. Finally, Sergey came out somewhat embarrassed that he was sleeping so late, but he found a good excuse—after all, it was a school vacation.

I noticed that he was dressed in more casual clothing than he had worn at our school. His aunt prepared him breakfast and offered me a cup of tea. At the table Sergey asked me about some pupils in our class and then he suggested accompanying me to the Palace of the Pioneers,<sup>6</sup> where the city children could attend many clubs and participate in other activities. It really didn’t make any difference to me where we went, as long as I could be with him for a few hours. But I politely said that it sounded very interesting because in our small town there was no such place for youth.

The Palace of the Pioneers was located in a big building and the interior was similar to the school with many rooms with names on the doors such as “Music,” “Gymnastics,” “Chess,” “Art,” and others naming the activities or various clubs. Sergey lead me through the halls, opening the doors and letting me see what was going inside. Most of the rooms were empty and he explained that it was because during the winter vacation not all the clubs were open. He showed me most of the building, including an assembly hall with a big stage as in the real theater.

Since I didn’t know how to return to my aunt’s apartment from that part of the city, Sergey accompanied me there in the streetcar. As we were traveling, he told me the names of some buildings that we were passing by. I asked him something about his school in the city. He proudly said that it was definitely better than the one in Slavyansk, and that his teachers were excellent, especially in the subjects that he was interested in, literature and history. I expected that maybe he would invite me again to show me some other place, like some museum, but he didn’t volunteer. I decided to tell him that I would not be sitting idle the whole week, but that I would have a very good and interesting time without him, and I bragged that my uncle had promised to take me to the museum, to the opera, and to the theater. Sergey replied something like this, “Good for you. You are lucky to have such a good uncle.”

When we arrived at my streetcar stop I invited him to come up to the room by telling him that I had brought a small gift for him, which I forgot to bring to his home. To enter the apartment, I had to knock at the door and wait until the woman living in the

other room would let us in. She was very surprised to see that I had returned with a boy, but she didn't make any comments.

In my aunt's room I asked Sergey to sit down, but he declined, telling me that he was already late for lunch. I took from my luggage a small brass lapel-pin shaped like a lyre, a symbol of lyrical poetry. Then I walked toward him and slowly began to unbutton his overcoat. I felt his face close to mine, but didn't look at his face until I was ready to insert the pin in his suit's jacket lapel. Then I looked straight in his eyes and said solemnly, "I hope that this lyre will inspire you to write beautiful poetry!"

I saw that Sergey was embarrassed from being so close to me, as he made a step back and said, "Thank you! Thank you very much for your thought. But now I have to go. Say 'hello' to Fima and to the pupils in your class." And he extended his hand for a handshake.

As I held his hand, I said, "I enjoyed visiting with you. Thank you for showing me the Palace of the Pioneers."

He quickly exited the room and, as we were already in the entrance hall he said, "Good-bye."

"I hope to see you soon," I answered. I was happy, and my imagination was flying ahead to the next time I would see him again.

My uncle Pyetya accompanied me every evening to the theater and on some evenings my aunt also came with us. We saw the operas "Carmen," "Yevgeny Onyegin," "Queen Of Spades," the ballet "Swan Lake," and the play "Anna Karenina." Petya, as a student could not afford such expense, and my aunt paid for all the tickets. She told me that this was her present for my graduation.

I was also fascinated when my aunt showed me all her fine outfits that she could afford to buy in the *Lux* store in the city. She had good taste and bought very elegant and good quality clothing. I admired all her fashions, but especially liked the fur jacket made of white squirrel. My aunt promised that she would give it to me after I graduated from the Institute.

It was a memorable trip for me and I was full of enthusiasm about the life in the big city, where there is so much cultural entertainment that was completely lacking in our provincial town. I made a decision to apply to the Institute in some large city where I would have a chance to attend the best school and have a stimulating cultural environment.

When I returned home, I wrote a long letter to Sergey right away describing to him all I had seen at the opera and the theater in Kharkov and emphasized how I enjoyed visiting him. To my surprise, he answered this time very quickly, but the biggest disappointment was that he mailed again his answer to me together with his letter to Fimka, who, of course, read it before giving it to me. Fimka knew that I had seen Sergey in Kharkov because I had conveyed to him and to the class his greetings. But he was puzzled with all those enigmatic names that Sergey was mentioning in his letter. It was good that he asked me about them on the next day, because I had time to check those names in the encyclopedia and even made myself a list of who they were.

"Well," I told Fimka, "since you have read his letter that was meant for me, I shall try to do my best to explain it to you. When I visited Sergey, I asked him, what or who inspired him to write poetry, and this is his explanation. He is telling me that as a poet he has given his heart to many beautiful Muses and could not love anyone else."

Then I took my notes and read to him, "In Greek mythology Muses were mythical spirits inspiring poets. Their names are: Thalia—the Muse of pastoral poetry; Polyhymnia—the Muse of sacred poetry; Calliope—the Muse of eloquence and epic poetry; Erato—the Muse of lyric and love poetry; and Euterpe—the Muse of music and lyric poetry."

I stopped abruptly, looked at Fimka with an air of superiority, and added, "I hope that your curiosity is satisfied."

"Ah," replied Fimka, "I thought that he was telling you about the many girls that he was in love with."

"Indeed," I replied confusing him even more, "they are very famous girls, they are the mythical Greek goddesses."

Fimka was disappointed, because he was ready to hurt my feelings by implying that Sergey was telling me that he was not in love with me. Fimka could never forgive me for hurting his pride when I wrote him a short verse that ended like this:

"Sometime in the past  
I imagined I was in love with you.  
Now, only to think about it  
Makes me laugh. But,...  
It was such a long time ago..."

However, I knew that his guessing about Sergey's writings was right. It was an answer from Sergey to my infatuation with him. He was telling me that there was no room in his heart for love for me. Now it was clear that my love for him was unreciprocated, but I couldn't let it go and kept on writing him, as long as he was answering me. And I continued to dream and hope.

That year we had many entertainments organized in our school. First, we had a talent show in which the students presented some of their best achievements—some played piano; the others recited poetry; a group of students sang popular songs with Raya Gunicheva as the soloist; some danced folk dances; some performed gymnastics; the two ballerinas, Galochka<sup>7</sup> Chernyavskaya and another girl, all dressed in a tutu made of white tulle, performed a ballet piece. The students from drama club presented a play in which Kostya Syrota<sup>8</sup> played the role of Baltazar Baltazarovich Zhevakin, and Musya Davidenko played the bride.

There was also another change in the extracurricular activities in our school. After winter vacation floor dances were held in the evenings before the days off. Until that year only folk dances and ballet were considered as Soviet approved art to be allowed in the schools. Modern floor dancing, and even the classical waltz, were considered decadent bourgeois pastimes. One of the pupils volunteered to play piano. The pupils could come and dance if they already knew how. There was no instructor to teach dancing to those who were novices; they were left to learn from each other.

It was an awkward situation for many who didn't dare ask someone to teach them and they were standing or sitting on the chairs placed along the walls of the hall. Among them were Syma, Kostya, and me. Yasha was too shy—he didn't attend them.

Kostya said to me, "Olya, let's try it."

"Kostya, I don't know how to dance," I answered. "Do you?" "No," he replied frankly.

"Well," I suggested, "you better look for some of those girls who are dancing now

and on the next round ask one of them to teach you. Believe me, no one would refuse it to a boy as handsome as you are.”

So he did just that. I remember that some other boy asked me to dance and I thought, “Maybe he knows how,” and accepted. But it didn’t work because he also didn’t know what he was doing.

On our way home I asked Kostya to accompany me inside our courtyard because it was a very dark night without the moon and I told him the truth—that I was plain scared. He didn’t laugh or joke about my fear and escorted me right to the door. As we entered our gate, the faithful watchdog Sharik ran to encounter us without disturbing the silence of the night with his barking. He silently stroked his long fur against our legs and accompanied us on the long pathway. Kostya said, “Smart dog, Sharik, you recognize our footsteps even in the dark.”

Toward the end of the school-year most of the pupils who planned to continue their education had already decided on a couple of institutes of higher education that they preferred to attend, and they were beginning to send in their applications. My friend Kostya made his decision a long time before anyone else had even begun to think about it and sent his application to the Naval Military Academy in the city of Leningrad. He had already received a letter with the date to present himself there for the entrance examinations, which were right after the final exams in our Ten-Years-School.

Although my father was still trying to convince me to select some area in chemistry field, I was not enthusiastic at all about studying it further. Instead I liked physics and mathematics and wanted to select some area where I would continue to study in these subjects in which I was very good. I consulted with my teacher of physics, Yudin, and with my uncle Igor, who was an electrical technician. They both suggested the field of electrical engineering and made me become enthusiastic about it by describing some of the challenges and many choices in the type of work I could select, as well as the abundant availability of employment in any city, town, or region of the country. And I decided on that field.

My teacher of physics suggested the best and the most prestigious institute of electrical engineering in the country and without hesitation I applied for admission to the MEI, Moscow Power Institute<sup>9</sup> in the Department of Electrical Engineering.

Neither Syma nor Yasha had decided yet what they would do, Although Syma wanted to follow in the footsteps of her two sisters, one who was already a doctor, and the other who was studying in the Medical Institute, Syma was not sure if she could pass the entrance examinations at any institute. Yasha was as usual undecided and was still afraid he couldn’t even pass the final exams to graduate from the Ten-Years-School. But Kostya and I were sure that with our help he could do it. The other students from our class were planning to attend various institutes, some decided to attend technical schools, and others were just looking for employment.

It was shortly before the end of the school year that the friendship between Musya Davidenko and me suddenly blossomed. For some time we had liked each other because neither both of us had the habit of gossiping and felt that we could trust one another. Musya was going through a difficult period, trying to detach herself from her perfectionist cousin Lena Tarasenko. She found me a good listener and a trusted friend with whom she could share her feelings. For some reason Lena wasn’t threatened by Musya’s friendly relationship with me, as, for example she was hostile to Musya’s

attempts to become friends with Raya

Kyrychenko, who was the secretary of our class Komsomol cell.

Musya and I had much in common in preparing ourselves for the entrance exams in institutes and we consulted with each other about what we had to do in order to be on time to mail our applications. We went together to make our photographs for passports and exchanged extra copies with each other on May 24, 1940.<sup>10</sup> Two days later we went to the regional office of the NKVD with our birth certificates<sup>11</sup> to receive our first passports<sup>12</sup> that were required if we had to move to another city and had to register there for the residency.

Musya applied to the Kharkovsky Medical Institute and we promised to keep in touch with each other. Her cousin Lyena applied to the Aeronautical Institute in Moscow, because, as she explained, she was determined to meet and marry a pilot. Her parents decided to move to Moscow to have their daughter live with them.

Kostya and I were working hard studying intensively because it was important to have high grades to apply to the prestigious institutions. We found out that tutoring Syma and Yasha was very helpful to us in mastering the subject matter ourselves.

When I received the letter from the Moscow Power Institute that I was accepted for the competitive entrance examinations, it stated that there were eight applicants to one available place and that the exams were scheduled for the month of August. The subjects for the examinations were: written and oral—in mathematics, and Russian language; oral—in physics, chemistry, and German.

Although I was sure about my knowledge in these subjects, I was not sure how much was required to pass the entrance examinations with such stiff competition—I was afraid even to think about it. I began frantically preparing myself in these subjects and was quickly completely exhausted.

Being a teacher, my mother found out that if a pupil had a medical reason he could be excused from the final exams in the Ten-Years-School and could select to take the final exams later in the summer, or agree to have on a diploma the average grades in each subject for all four years of study.

With my father we calculated my average grades from seventh to the tenth grade. In arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, physics, Russian and Ukrainian literature, history, Constitution of the USSR, and military science my average grades were "Excellent"; in Russian, Ukrainian, and German languages, geography, chemistry, geology and mineralogy, astronomy, and drafting they were "Good." My father suggested that it was as good as I would get, even if I took the final exams. Therefore, it was a family decision that my mother should bring me to the doctor and ask for a written excuse from school, because I was exhausted and needed to have some rest before I departed for the entrance exams in Moscow.

Right before the final exams were to start, we went to the doctor, who agreed that this was best for me and gave me a written statement excusing me from school. Because I needed to send my diploma to the Institute right away, I elected not to take the final exams later that summer and to have my Four-Years average grades on my Ten-Years-School Diploma as it was the regulation at that time.<sup>13</sup>

Having a medical excuse from attending the school during the exams, I stayed home and studied for the entrance examinations to the Institute. During that time I saw only Yasha and Syma, who came to see me often, but Kostya, who lived very far from us,

came only once after school to find out how I felt. He said that he was preparing for the exams intensively and he felt that he had done very well on those that he had taken until then.

Being on medical leave, I couldn't go to school and regrettably didn't see anyone else from my class to say good-bye after the exams were finished. I didn't see Kostya, who had departed for Leningrad immediately after the last exam. Yasha and Syma had successfully passed all examinations and received the Ten-Years-School Diploma. It made me feel proud of having helped them during the year.

Yasha came to say good-bye to me before he left to stay with his mother for the summer. Syma and Musya remained at home and we saw each other couple of times before I departed for Moscow.

My mother was worrying that I didn't have any decent coats for the fall and winter to take with me. If we could find the fabrics, my grandfather could sew them for me, but in our town there was only one cooperative and its shelves were empty. Then one day early in the morning, when my mother was going to the market and was crossing the Church Square, she saw that there was a long line of people standing along the sidewalk by the entrance door of the Tailoring Cooperative Shop. She asked someone what they were waiting for. They told her that there was a rumor that any day the cooperative could receive fabrics to use in their tailor shop.

My mother promptly returned home with the news and ordered me to come quickly with her to take a place in line. At the end of the line someone numbered our hands with an indelible ink pencil and we were told by the old-timers that if we don't want to forfeit our turn, we should be prepared to stay in line for several days and nights. During the day the *militsionyery*, the militiamen who were in charge of a civilian order in town, didn't bother the people who were standing in line; it was a normal everyday event to see people in line by any shop, except the Universal Store, where everything was sold at elevated prices. The first day my mother and I were switching standing in line, while the other was going home to rest. That day the fabrics didn't arrive. Word of mouth passed to all people standing in line that if they didn't want to lose their place, they should not abandon the line but remain standing all through the night.

That first night my mother and I stayed together until about eleven and observed that all the people seemed to be decent, of a nonsuspicious type, and she felt that I could stay with them until morning, when she would return and I would go home to rest.

At night I found out that the *militsionyery* didn't allow anyone to stay in line on the sidewalk, and that it was a common practice for the people standing in line to move from the sidewalk to the near movie theater that was located in the building of the former church standing in the middle of the Church Square, now named Lenin Square. We were told by the old-timers to remember the faces and the names of several people who were ahead of us and behind us, to maintain some kind of order by forming several large groups, and once in a while to check if everybody was there. If anyone had disappeared for some time, they would lose their place.

Because the movie theater was open, the *militsionyery* were not bothering anyone who was standing there. But after midnight when the theater had closed the doors, word of mouth brought us the suggestion that now we should divide into several smaller groups of about ten persons, and that each group should stand at some distance from the next one, position itself somewhere around the church building, and

only occasionally check with the other groups to see if everyone was there.

The *militsionyery* were coming about every hour or so and they were ordering each group to go home. We learned the answer to promise them convincingly, "Yes, comrade, we shall go home soon." And then the group would change their place, moving around the former church building and staying faithfully with the people that were before and after them in line.

Although it was summer, toward the morning the temperature fell and I felt cold and tired standing for so many long hours on my feet. My mother came very early in the morning and sent me home to sleep. I came back after lunch and stayed in line until supper, but no fabrics arrived that day either. Again my mother stayed the second evening until midnight and I gave her a break until the next morning. That third morning someone brought the news that maybe today the fabrics would arrive in the Cooperative Tailor Shop and my mother told me to eat breakfast, to rest for just a while, and to return in time for the opening of the Shop, although we were in line quite far from the door.

Indeed, the fabrics arrived and the salesperson was admitting a few people at a time into the shop. Only in the afternoon came our turn and we entered the shop. There was not much selection of fabrics and they were all thin, the kind that were appropriate for spring and the autumn coats. My mother asked if they had the heavier fabrics because we needed a winter coat. The salesperson answered almost sarcastically, "It is summer and we are now sewing only coats for the fall. The fabrics for winter coats would arrive sometime in September. Do you want any of these fabrics or not?" And without waiting for our answer he busied himself with the next customer.

My mother and I consulted with each other and decided that I needed the coats, and we selected for the autumn coat one wool flannel fabric in light gray with narrow black stripe. Then we decided to order another coat in a couple of sizes bigger and then to ask my grandfather to add quilted lining to make it warm for the winter. For this one we selected a fabric of beige wool Cheviot, tightly woven in a twill weave that would protect well from the winter wind.

There were only a few styles that we could choose, because those were the patterns that arrived in the shop with the fabrics for the autumn coats. The tailor took my measurements and was wondering why we wanted to have one coat made two sizes bigger. My mother patiently explained that I needed a winter coat and that we would add the quilted lining later.

The coats were made to the standard sizes and the fit was not perfect; the workmanship was also not of the quality we were used to in my grandfather's work. But my mother decided not to fuss about it saying to me, "Grandfather will correct it all!" Indeed my grandfather fitted the coats well, made all the needed alterations and, from one of them, he made a nice winter coat that I wore for many years. I could never forget those three days and nights that my mother and I had to stay in line to have those coats.

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1. See the chapter "True Friendship and First Love."

2. A territory of the eastern part of Poland that was occupied and annexed in 1939 by the Soviet Union. See the chapter "Becoming Conscious of My Political Views."

3. See the chapter "Becoming Conscious of My Political Views."

4. Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya, the younger sister of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky.

5. Pyetr Gavriylovich Berezhnoy, the youngest brother of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky.

6. The communist organization for school-age children.
7. Diminutive of Galina. The younger sister of Olga Chernyavskaya. Also see the chapter "Germans - Invaders or Liberators."
8. Play by Alexandr N. Ostrovsky, "The Marriage of Balzaminov." Also from the preserved photograph of Kostya in the role of Baltazar Baltazarovich.
9. MEI – acronym for *Moscovsky Energetichesky Institute*.
10. From the preserved photograph of Musya Davidenko.
11. From the original birth certificate.
12. From the original first Soviet passport.
13. From a copy of the Ten-Years-School Diploma.

## Moscow's Power Institute

By Olga Gladky Verro

On July 30, 1940 I was departing to Moscow for my entrance examinations at the prestigious Moscow's Power Institute.<sup>1</sup> Late in the afternoon my parents and I took Vyetka, the local branch train, to the Slavyansk Station. There I had to board the express train arriving from the Caucasus<sup>2</sup> and going north to Moscow and further to Leningrad.

My parents and I had great hope that I would successfully pass the competitive<sup>3</sup> entrance examinations and would be accepted as a first-year student at the Institute. In this case we decided that after the examinations I should remain in Moscow for the first semester and return home only for the winter vacation at the end of January. This implied that I had to take with me the needed clothing for three seasons, summer, fall, and winter. I also had to take bed linen, blanket, pillow, quilt, and towels. Although I was taking only the minimum necessary, these items filled a large suitcase and a big bundle. Moreover, I needed the textbooks for a review before the exams. I placed them in a large market bag and filled it to capacity with toiletries and food for the trip; on top of it I placed my handbag with my documents and money.

As we were waiting on the platform for the express train to arrive, my mother was very agitated and repeated endlessly all the precautions that I, as a young girl, should be aware of when traveling alone, or while living in a big city. Before boarding the train I embraced and kissed my anxious mother, promising and reassuring her that I would be careful and judicious in everything she had advised me about and that she shouldn't be concerned about me.

My father brought my luggage inside the hard-seated car, the only one for which tickets were available on our rail station; the sleeping cars were all filled by passengers returning to Moscow and Leningrad from vacations at Caucasus. My father carefully selected the compartment where I could sit in the corner near the window. He also chose to place me where most of the passengers were women of a nonsuspicious appearance.

After placing my luggage on the high luggage shelf, he stayed with me for a while giving me last minute practical suggestions on how I should handle the money. Then he whispered to me, "If the two hundred rubles that I gave you are not enough for your living expenses and school supplies, let me know and I will send you some more." When

we heard the whistle announcing the departure of the train, my father embraced me tightly, gave me a quick kiss on my cheek and left in a hurry.

It was a long trip of more than one thousand kilometers from Slavyansk and it took about twenty-four hours to arrive at my destination. In the big stations, such as Kharkov,<sup>4</sup> Kursk,<sup>5</sup> and Orel,<sup>6</sup> the train waited endlessly either for the locomotive to be serviced or changed, or for the arrival of trains on the connecting rail lines to pick up the passengers who needed to transfer to the express train going North.

At the station in Kursk the train waited a long time and many beggars came through the car. After giving to the first beggars, the passengers didn't respond anymore to the pleas of those who came later. But I, as well as the passengers in my compartment, were very impressed with one frail old man who, extending his trembling bony hand, was pleading in a feeble voice, "Kind people, I beg you only for a piece of bread... Please could you give me a piece of bread... You are traveling from Ukraine, you should have some bread."

One passenger offered him some coins, but the old man refused the money explaining, "This year we had a very poor harvest in our region. The peasants had to give their established quota of grain to the government. There was nothing left for us." Several passengers, including me, were very moved by the plea of the old peasant and one-by-one we opened our bags and shared some food with him; and were also generous with the other beggars who came after.

I thought it was ironic that, after almost thirty years of socialist economy, the peasants who toiled to feed the rest of the country were reduced to begging for a piece of bread to feed themselves. This episode influenced me deeply and reinforced in my mind the already germinating seeds sown by my father's strong aversion to the Soviet government and for the ruling Communist Party.

The next day late in the afternoon I arrived at the big railroad station in Moscow. I was holding the detailed directions mailed to me from the Institute and carefully followed them on what number streetcars I had to take and which stop to get off. It stated that from the streetcar stop I had to walk to Krasnokazarmennaya Street, No. 17 to the offices of the Power Institute that would be kept open all day and night to receive the arriving applicants.

When I got out of the streetcar there were several people on the platform waiting for their streetcars to arrive. I asked one middle-aged woman for directions to the Power Institute, but she replied that she didn't know. One presentable man who overheard us approached me and very politely offered his advice. "It is already late, the Institute's office is already closed. You should go there tomorrow morning. If you come with me, I shall help you to find a place to stay overnight."

The woman whom I had asked for directions looked with suspicion at the man and shook her head. I understood her thoughts and told the man as politely as he offered, "The Institute's directions state that today their office shall be open twenty-four hours and that the office shouldn't be too far from this streetcar stop. Could you, please, indicate the direction in which I should walk over there?"

The man obviously didn't like my answer, because he suddenly changed his polite manners and answered quite rudely, "Go across the street and ask someone over there!"

"Thank you," I replied and took in one hand my large suitcase and in the other

both the big bundle and the bag, and slowly walked to the other side of the street. There I found a *militsioner*<sup>7</sup> who gave me the directions.

Indeed the office was just around the corner on the next street and it was open. There were already several young girls and boys waiting. The employee checked my papers and assigned me to a dormitory room. She told me to wait with the others until our guide to the dormitory arrived and to come for the formal registration tomorrow morning to that office. It was already dark when the guide accompanied all of us on the streetcar to the Institute's dormitory complex located at Number 7, Lefortovsky Val.

I was assigned to room number 58 on the second floor of a building 12, which faced the street. When I entered, the two girls greeted me in a friendly manner.

"I am Rita..."

"I am Valentina Zakharova, but I like to be called Valya."

"I am Olga Gladkaya,<sup>8</sup> and you may call me Olya," I replied.

The girls were sitting on the beds that were placed on the two sides of the big window. The beds were already made-up, covered with blankets, and had pillows propped up against the wall. Near the door was another bed with just a mattress on it. I placed the bundle with my bedding on top of it and began to unpack. In the room there were three chairs and two small tables; one table was placed under the window between the two beds and another was opposite my bed. Near the door was a small wooden wardrobe. A narrow passageway lead from the door to the window and high on the ceiling was hung a plain light bulb.

Valya told me that they had just returned from a cafeteria that was located in the dormitory complex next to our building. She advised me that if I wanted to eat something, it would be open for about an hour longer.

"Do they have any tea or milk?" I asked. "I ate only dry food while waiting in the Institute's office."

"Yes, they have them," replied Valya.

I placed my suitcase under the bed and went downstairs.

I was not very impressed with the students' cafeteria because it was already late in the evening and there was only leftover food. I had a glass of milk with a small white bun and quickly returned to my room.

The girls told me that they had already found out that there was a bathroom with several stalls and sinks and a shower room to be used by all the girls living on our floor. They said there was also one small communal kitchen that we could use if we wanted to cook something; we could purchase food from the grocery cooperative that was located close to the dormitory complex. On the ground floor there was a large study hall with tables, chairs, and drafting boards that all students in that building could use.

That evening all three of us were in a good mood and we got acquainted with each other. We had two things in common—we all were from small towns, and it was the first time that we had been away from home on our own.

One of my roommates, Rita,<sup>9</sup> was tall, well built, and had a large but attractive face with slightly prominent cheekbones, and dark brown eyes accentuated by the wide brown eyebrows. Her long dark brown hair was parted on one side and was collected low in the back from ear-to-ear in a soft roll. She was from a small town located somewhere near the Ural Mountains. Rita was applying to the Power Station Construction Department.

The other roommate, Valentina,<sup>10</sup> was a little bit shorter than I. She had an open, fair-skinned face with well-proportioned but minute features and pensive gray eyes. She casually combed back her short dark-blond hair, curled slightly at the ends. She was from the small town of Zaraysk in the Moscow Region. Like me, she was applying to the Electrical Engineering Department.

On the first day, we found out that in the morning there was a big crowd in the bathrooms and, if we didn't want to wait long, we should get up earlier in the morning to be among the first to get to the sinks. The first day the three of us did everything together and it was easier for us to find our way around the big city. We took the streetcar and went to the Institute's offices to register and receive the schedules of the examinations. There we were told to go to the Moscow 39th *Militsia* Precinct to register for a temporary residency. We were surprised that on our passports they registered us only from the first to the twenty-fifth of August 1940, which was the date when our entrance examinations were ending.<sup>11</sup> Valentina commented, "Girls, if we don't pass the entrance examinations they don't want us to remain in Moscow!"

Since Valentina and I were applying to the Electrical Engineering Department, we had the same schedule for all entrance examinations. Rita, being in another department, had a different schedule from us. It became natural for Valentina and me to do many things together, to walk to the streetcar stop, to sit in the examination room, to return to the dormitory, and to go and eat in the cafeteria. Rita found herself a male companion right away and could do well without us.

The exams were scheduled with several free days between them, giving us enough time to review the textbooks that we brought from home. After taking the oral exams in physics, chemistry, Russian, and German, our grades were written on our Examination Sheets<sup>12</sup> right away and we could see our progress immediately. But the problems and questions on the written exams in mathematics varied among students. When we were returning to the dormitory, Valentina and I checked with each other on how we had solved our problems. It gave us peace of mind when the other considered our answers as being correct. This made Valentina and me drawn intellectually to each other right away.

When on our examination sheets were posted with the grades of the written exams, we became ecstatic. We both received the grade of "Excellent" in mathematics and already had "Excellent" in oral physics. These two subjects were considered the most important for the engineering field. In written and oral Russian, and in oral German and chemistry, I received the grades of "Good." Valentina also received "Good" and "Excellent" grades in those three subjects. On the same day Valentina, Rita, and I received acceptance certificates to the Moscow's Power Institute as first year students for the 1940-41 school year. This certificate was exchanged for the Student's Card,<sup>13</sup> valid from August 29, 1940 to February 11, 1941—from the beginning of the first semester to the beginning of the second semester.

Valentina, Rita, and I went to the post office right away to send telegrams to our parents. My message was short and concise in announcing the good news: "Passed examinations. Accepted at the Institute. Kiss you. Lyalya." At the post office I encountered Fimka Zusmanovich,<sup>14</sup> my schoolmate from Slavyansk. We had not known that both of us had applied to the Power Institute and we hadn't seen each other during the entrance exams. He was also sending a telegram to his parents notifying them that

he had been accepted at the Institute to the Power Stations Construction Department. Just in case we might need to contact each other, we exchanged the numbers of our buildings and rooms.

With the student's card we immediately went to the Moscow 39th *Militsia* Precinct for students' residency registration. They dated our passports<sup>15</sup> August 31, 1940, and as residing on Number 7, Lefortovsky Val, Building Number 12, Rm. 58.

Valentina, Rita, and I celebrated the occasion by buying transfer tickets for the Metro<sup>16</sup> that allowed us to change anywhere from one line to another without restrictions. We exited at each station and admired the beautiful marble walls that were decorated with bas-reliefs of Soviet art depicting the socialist-style idealized scenes of the happy life of workers in the factories and peasants harvesting the fields. We also enjoyed the luxury of a smooth, pleasant ride in the modern metro cars. For us, girls from small towns, it was an unusual spectacle and a thrilling experience, and we returned to the dormitory excited about the marvels of art and technology.

All first-year students in the Institute had the same schedule of lectures in physics and mathematics. In the Electrical Engineering Department Valentina and I were assigned to the same laboratories and practical exercises classes.

The Power Institute facilities were in three different locations. Several buildings were at the same location as the main offices of the Institute. In one of them was the main lecture hall. There the famous Professor Levin was giving his lectures in mathematics to all students enrolled in all departments of the same year of study. In the other buildings were the classrooms where all practical exercises classes were held.

The physics lecture hall and laboratory were located in another part of the city; to get there we had to take the streetcar, then transfer to the Metro, and from there walk to an old building that had a lecture hall shaped in the form of an amphitheater. There lectures were held for all students enrolled in all departments of the same year of study. The chemistry lecture hall and laboratory, as well as the drafting laboratory, were located in the recently constructed building at the Lefortovsky Val, which was walking distance from the students' dormitory.

In addition to the different locations of facilities, in order to accommodate the increased enrollment at the Institute, students were scheduled in three shifts. All first year students were scheduled for the third shift, which was held from five o'clock in the afternoon to ten o'clock in the evening.

Every day Valentina and I left the dormitory at about four o'clock in the afternoon, or earlier, if we had to travel to the physics lecture hall, and returned after eleven o'clock at night. In the beginning we tried to go to sleep right away after returning from the lessons, but it did not work too well. In the morning there was no reason to get up very early because the bathrooms were crowded, but after we ate our breakfast, it was already close to ten o'clock. We studied for a couple of hours, and then we had to go to the cafeteria for lunch at the hours that it was open; after returning to the room there were less than three hours left for studying. With all these interruptions we were wasting a lot of time and could not accomplish all our assignments that we needed to do for that day.

We tried another alternative: doing our homework at night upon our return from the Institute and staying as long as necessary to finish most of our written assignments; then going to sleep, sometimes as late as four o'clock in the morning. We slept almost

until lunchtime, having just enough time for our morning grooming. After lunch we had plenty of time to do our reading assignments and to review some of the lessons to refresh our memory before the lectures and practical exercises classes. This routine worked very well for me because since fifth grade, I had always been scheduled for the second shift in school and was used to staying up late at night to do my homework and help my mother correct her students' papers; then I would sleep until late in the morning. Valentina was also a night person and we both felt very comfortable with this routine.

Right from the beginning, in our practical exercises classes we had a strong competition in mathematics and physics from some boys, who were very smart in these subjects. They formed a small subgroup and associated only casually with the rest of the students, whom they more or less treated as inferiors, because they couldn't always solve all the problems. But Valentina and I were strong in those subjects and we always had the problems solved. In addition, we were both willing to help our classmates. We were coming earlier to class and asking if anyone needed help with the assignment. And there were always a few boys and girls who were glad to have our help. For me it was not new helping the others; it resembled my cooperation with my good friend Kostya Syrota when we helped our friends Syma and Yasha.<sup>17</sup>

In the beginning one of the smart boys would occasionally mock Valentina and me by asking in a sarcastic tone of voice, "Girls, do you need our help in solving the problems?"

And we would answer in an innocent manner, "No, today the problems were not difficult at all."

But, as the assignments became more and more complex and we continued to solve the problems and to help others, it became clear that some of those boys didn't like to be outsmarted by two girls. Their feelings of needing to preserve their male superiority began to show by their loud mocking remarks, uttered in a sneering manner, "Listen, boys, today's math assignment was re-e-ally hard. Do you think that the girls had good luck again that helped them solve the problems?" Satisfied with their practical joke, they would look in our direction and laugh. But those students in our class who respected us for being helpful to them in occasional coaching were not amused with these jokes and would come close to us and encourage us not to be bothered by those snobs.

Although Valentina and I were somewhat annoyed with all this nonsense, we felt that we were winning in our competition with the brainy boys. And it also reinforced our drive to succeed in our studies so we could show those opinionated boys that girls could be as smart as they were.

After a short time of working independently in solving the problems in mathematics and physics and then comparing the results, Valentina and I found out that by consulting with each other during the progress of our work we could do it much quicker. Therefore, it soon became a normal way for us to solve them together; putting our brains together in one effort was more efficient than doing it alone.

We discovered that studying together with combined strength and resourcefulness was also stimulating. It was especially exciting to solve the problems in mathematics when the ideas, formulas, and numbers were flowing alternatively from our lips, as the links of a continuous chain created by the mysterious connection of our thoughts. We followed a progression toward the successful resolution of the problem

overwhelmed with the joy and almost intoxicated with this miracle of the fruitful union of two independent minds.

After the problem was solved, after having accomplished a very difficult task together, an extraordinary inner satisfaction was enveloping us both. We were in ecstasy like two lovers after the union of their souls. Our common motivation and drive to succeed in our studies and our great interest in the subject matter were cementing the bonds of harmonious togetherness and intellectual intimacy.

Sometimes in those moments of ecstasy we felt so close in our feelings that we were leaving aside the subject matter and the problem we were solving and spontaneously beginning to turn inside-out our souls, revealing our longings to find an ideal love of that special boy. We confided about our not-so-distant past infatuations with the boys in our life, our secret thoughts and uncertainties, our doubts and our hopes. Valentina knew that I was receiving postcards from Sergey Kairov<sup>18</sup> and she told me about the boys that she had fallen in love with before. But day-by-day our past feelings were becoming less and less intense and didn't lead us into the mood of love fantasies about the boys with whom we believed to be once in love. Many boys we were encountering in this large Institute were more real than those we left behind.

Meanwhile Valentina and I became friends with two boys and one girl from our practical exercises classes. They didn't live in the students' dormitory, but somewhere in the city with their families. Our friendship with them started gradually, as they sought our help with solving the most difficult problems in mathematics and some assignments in physics.

One of our friends was Tanya—Georgian by nationality. She was an exceptionally pretty girl of typical Caucasian beauty, with long black hair, big brown eyes, and a light complexion. She was very sincere, good-natured, unpretentious, and cheerful. She lived in the central part of the city in a two-room apartment with a small kitchen and, as was common in Moscow to help with the rent, her parents were sub-renting one of the rooms to two single men.

On some festive days when there were no classes, Valentina and I visited Tanya and enjoyed her mother's cookies. Tanya accompanied and introduced Valentina and me to the famous luxury store GUM,<sup>19</sup> which was full of merchandise not available anywhere else; some things were common necessities and some were luxury items. But we could only admire them because everything had such exorbitant prices that we students couldn't afford them, and most of people could probably buy them only on special occasions.

The other two friends were boys. One of them was Dyma Karklin. He was quite secretive about his family—the only thing he told us was that he and his younger sister lived with their grandmother and that his national origin was Finnish. Although he was smart, he often needed our help in catching up with the assignments because he worked during the day to help his grandmother make ends meet. Dyma was well built with broad shoulders and average height. He had an open face, light gray eyes, and straight blond hair that he combed smooth toward the back. He had a very pleasant personality, good manners, amiable disposition, and associated well with others. He could speak easily on any subject; however, he never engaged in any conversation good or bad about the Soviet government or the Communist Party and its leaders.

The other boy was Misha, whose last name I don't remember. He was a native of

Moscow and lived with his parents. Misha was very shy and a little bit awkward in his movements, resembling a bear, which fitted with his name; Misha had the same spelling in Russian as teddy bear. For some reason, right from the beginning, we started to tease him that he was in love with Valentina; this embarrassed him and his face would turn red, but he never tried to deny it.

The five of us used to sit close together in the classroom and in the lecture halls, where whoever would come first would save places for all of us by placing books or notebooks on the seats. The boys, now and then, visited us in the dormitory in the early afternoon, mostly when they needed help in mathematics, and then we traveled together to the Institute. As a group we occasionally went out, sometimes to the movies, or to the museums. Once, following a suggestion by Valentina, we went to Red Square and stayed in a long line to the Mausoleum to see the preserved body of Lenin. Seeing the small red-haired head and yellowish-ebony face of this so-called great leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Revolution,<sup>20</sup> left a very negative impression on me. But, as all my other friends, I kept my opinion to myself.

In good weather we enjoyed walking in Gorky Park and along the Moscow River. Together, we also visited the Agricultural Exhibition. And one time the boys were able to get tickets at the Spartak Stadium and we went to watch the *futbol*<sup>21</sup> game. For me it was the first soccer game that I had seen.

Valentina was a member of the Komsomol<sup>22</sup> and soon after the beginning of the semester she was elected as the secretary of the Komsomol cell of our practical exercises class. This position in the youth organization suddenly elevated her status in the eyes of the students. And those boys, who were earlier envious of her achievements in mathematics and physics, stopped their open competitive spirit toward her; since before it had been directed toward both of us, it also stopped toward me. They changed their attitude so much that when the problems were very difficult some of them even dared to ask if they could check the solutions with us.

As the secretary of the Komsomol cell Valentina had the task of enlisting more students to become members of the organization. But she surprised me completely when she sincerely discouraged me from becoming a member by saying, "Olga, Komsomol is not for you. You are very independently-minded and are too quick in saying what you think straightforward, without being afraid to tell your opinion. This would get you in trouble very quickly and you would not survive for long in the organization. To be a good member of the Komsomol one needs to be able to listen, to obey, and to follow the directions from those above you who get them from the Central Committee. One should never criticize their orders."

After hearing this advice from Valentina, I was glad that with all our friendship and openness, I had never told her any of my political views, of my dislike of the Soviet government and the Communist Party. Probably very unconsciously I remembered how my mother always warned my father to be cautious even in front of me in expressing his deep hatred toward them. But my friendship with Valentina didn't change after her new political appointment and we concentrated as before on our academic achievements and in helping our classmates with the assignments.

Besides an occasional outing with our friends, we didn't have much time for socializing, especially if it involved traveling across the big city; studying was taking most of our time. Once I visited my friend from Slavyansk, Zoya Litvinova,<sup>23</sup> in her

dormitory. She was in her second year of study in the Institute of Foreign Languages, where she was studying French. Zoya was two years older than I, but we knew each other well because her mother was a childhood friend of my mother and her sister Tanya; also, my father and her mother worked together in the Printing House, making our families bound by the long friendship.

Several times I visited my Slavyansk schoolmate Lena Tarasenko, a cousin of my friend Musya Davidenko. Lena lived in Moscow now with her parents, who moved there to be with their daughter who attended the Institute of Aeronautics. They lived in a small apartment in a newly built apartment complex on the other end of the city, and it took a long time for me to travel there from our students' dormitory. I had to change streetcars twice and take the Metro. When I visited her I usually stayed there overnight. We slept together in her bed and usually talked late into the night. She confided in me that she didn't have any girlfriends, but that she had already dated a few older boys from her institute. She told me that her goal was to get married to a tall handsome young man, who definitely planned to be a pilot. Lena never came to visit me and we didn't go anywhere together.

Of course I saw occasionally my schoolmate from Slavyansk, Fimka Zusmanovich, but it happened most of the time at the lectures for all first-year students in the mathematics lecture hall. We usually exchanged some news from home, or our opinions about the instructors and professors, and about the courses we were taking. Once in a while he asked me for news of Sergey Kairov, with whom he didn't correspond anymore.

Most of our professors and teachers of practical exercises classes were very good and dedicated educators. But the star of the Institute was Professor Levin, who gave lectures in mathematics. He was known to have attended the famous and prestigious Oxford University in England. Very few Soviet professors were allowed to attend universities abroad and he certainly was an exceptional professor.

He was always dressed impeccably as an Englishman in an exquisitely tailored black suit; his tall and slender figure moved with distinction on the elevated rostrum in front of the auditorium as he wrote with self-assured ease mathematical formulas one after another on the huge blackboard. And we students barely had time to copy them, while also trying to make the annotations of his explanations.

I remember that once after filling the blackboard with formulas, Professor Levin told us, "You probably wonder how I remember all these formulas. Well, this morning before coming here I had to take out the textbook and review them. Remember, in mathematics formulas are very important for making the calculations and supporting the logic. I expect for you to learn them and that they will remain in your memory at least until your next test, and that you will definitely review them before your final exams. It is impossible to remember them for the rest of your life. The important thing is that you remember the logic on which they are based, and that you know where to find them when you will need in your practical applications in the future."

We were also lucky to have a very capable teacher, Dmytrov, who conducted the practical exercises class in mathematics. He was able to give life to the practical applications of the theoretical logic that Professor Levin was lecturing on.

We also had an excellent Professor Belikov, who gave lectures in physics and always presented interesting demonstrations that we could observe from our seats in

the amphitheater-shaped auditorium. A very good and dedicated teacher, Mantsev supported Belikov's lectures in practical exercises class in physics. He remembered that he gave me a grade of "Excellent" during the entrance examinations and always expected me to live up to the higher standard of performance in his class.

We very much enjoyed the laboratory in mechanical drafting with a capable but strict instructor, and the clear visual demonstrations by Professor Genkin. Valentina and I spent many night hours working diligently to have perfect drafting projects. Another pleasant teacher whose class we liked was Yevreinova, who taught us technical German language. But we weren't lucky in chemistry—Professor Glasunov was giving the most boring lectures and the teacher Sobolyev was not capable of making our lessons connected to real life in our practical exercises classes.

Then there was one subject named Foundation of Marxism-Leninism that was obligatory for all first year students. I hated it and considered a waste of my time to attend, while Valentina liked it and insisted that it was a very important part of our education. Lecture and practice class were conducted by a meticulous *partiyzy*, as were called the party members.

The lecturer who was elevated to a title of professor was decorated with the medals that he displayed on his chest pinned to some kind of military uniform. One of the medals, if I remember correctly, was for the "battle of Baku." This "professor" was not able to put together two words in correct Russian. During his lectures in a big lecture hall, to keep from being bored, a group of the students invented a game of taking notes of "professor's" mistakes. And then after the lecture to compare who was able to catch up more mistakes. And we called him the "complete alphabet."

The practice class was conducted by another communist party member, who expected students to memorize all politically important dates, including days, of the Communist and Bolshevik historical events, and the exact words and phrases of the famous speeches and doctrines of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin.

But Valentina and I were so much involved in our preferred subjects of physics and mathematics and with the time-consuming, but important mechanical drafting projects, that we didn't give much importance to the occasional disappointments with the chemistry, which was not our major subject. I was also trying not to be upset by the nonsense of the political communist indoctrination. On this topic Valentina and I agreed to disagree, without further discussions.

Toward the end of the first semester the Central Commissariat of the People's Education issued new regulations completely changing the long-existing rules pertaining to the right for free education in the institutions of higher learning. The students were informed that beginning with the second semester of the 1940-41 school year, students had to pay tuition.

Other surprising and unwelcome news came for the needy students, who were receiving a stipend for their living expenses. According to the new regulations, anyone could earn a stipend and become exempt from paying the tuition, regardless of their economic need, if in the preceding semester two-thirds of their grades were "Excellent" and the rest were "Good." The grade of "Satisfactory" remained as a passing grade for any course. For the practical exercises and for the laboratory, which continued for the whole school-year, the grade remained to be given at the end of the school-year, or, instead of the grade, it could be evaluated as "Passed" or "Failed" with the number of

hours of attendance during the semester. The textbooks continued to be free by borrowing them from the institutes' libraries.

These new regulations were not applicable to the military institutions of higher learning, where education continued to be free and needy students could receive the stipend. Students were encouraged to transfer to the military academies with the benefit of transferring of their earned credits in the institutes and being placed in the same year of study.

These new regulations resulted in an unprecedented and open discontent among students, who loudly and bluntly were pronouncing their negative opinions, and were using disparaging expressions about the Soviet government, the Communist Party, and Comrade Stalin himself. The needy students accused them of breaking the promise for free education and for treating the poor students unjustly. Especially clamorous were the students who were economically dependent on the stipend and had average grades.

The male students were convinced that this was a trick by the military establishment, which needed more officers. Students protested that because there were not enough young men enrolling in the military academies, the Soviet government was forcing them against their will to become the pawns of the military. In the halls, classrooms, laboratories, lecture halls, dormitory, and in the cafeteria one could hear animated and unrestrained discussions only on one theme, the injustice of the Communist Party and the Soviet government toward the students.

I was surprised to hear spoken aloud such phrases as, "Damned 'Father' Stalin, he needs more military officers!"

"Where are the promises of the Soviet government to provide free higher education for the sons and daughters of the workers?!"

"Those fat Communists, they have plenty of money to pay for the education of their children! They don't care about us."

For average students it was already too late to bring up their grades to the level needed to be exempt from the tuition and to receive the stipend. But Valentina and I had such good grades during the semester that all we needed now was to do as well on the semester's final exams. And those grades would qualify us for the second semester for the benefits and privileges that the others were losing—the stipend and the free tuition.

All three of our friends decided to remain in our Institute. For Tanya and Misha there was no problem with paying tuition since their parents could afford it. But, for Dyma Karklin it was hard to come up with the tuition money, since he was already disqualified from receiving the stipend and he lived with his grandmother and younger sister and was working part time to help with the expenses. It was at this time that Dyma dared to disclose that when he applied at the beginning of the year for the stipend they refused him on the ground that he couldn't provide the proof of his parents' income, or their death certificates. But he didn't explain to us why he couldn't have done it.

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1. The V. M. Molotov, Order of Lenin, Moscow's Power Institute, acronym - MEI-*Moscowsky Energeticheskyy Institut*, [17 Krasnokazarmennaya Street, Moscow, USSR].

2. A territory between Black Sea and the Caspian Sea that includes the Caucasus Mountain Range.

3. That year at the MEI there were eight applicants for one available place.

4. The city in northeastern Ukraine north of Slavyansk.

5. The large town in southeastern Russia north of Kharkov.

6. The large town in southeastern Russia north of Kursk.
7. Singular form of *militsionery*.
8. Feminine spelling of the name Gladky.
9. From the preserved photograph.
10. From a photograph that I preserved.
11. From the passport residency registration.
12. From the institute's entrance examination sheet.
13. From the preserved student's card.
14. See the chapter "True Friendship and First Love."
15. From the passport page.
16. Moscow's subway.
17. See the chapter "True Friendship and First Love."
18. See the chapter "True Friendship and First Love."
19. *Gosudarstvenny Universalny Magazine* - The State Universal Department Store.
20. V.I. Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik faction of the Communist Party during the Russian Revolution of 1917-18; Communist Party Chairman and Premier of the Soviet Union, 1918-24.
21. Soccer.
22. Komsomol – acronym for *Kommunistichesky Soyuz Molodyezhy* - Young Communist League.
23. See the chapter "The Newspaper's Proofreader."

## Second Semester At The Power Institute

By Olga Gladky Verro

It was at the end of the first semester that I fell in love again, this time with Dyma Karklin. My infatuation with Sergey Kairov suddenly vanished, as the morning fog. It was a long time since I had received the last postcard from him; it had as usual been short, dry, and contained only a few statements about his whereabouts. I didn't feel like writing him back and I decided that it was time to end this nonsense. I wrote to him on a postcard a short message: "Hello from Moscow! A long time ago I received your last postcard. I am surprised that being a poet, you write such dull, uninteresting letters. I think that it is time that we should stop our correspondence. So long! Olga."

I showed Valentina the postcard and, while she was reading it, I explained, "I should have written this to him long ago. I could never figure out why he was continuing to answer my letters since he didn't care about me at all. Although I never mentioned in my letters that I was in love with him, I think he knew it, and my letters were nourishing his vanity by making him feel loved and admired. I feel so good that it is I who is telling him to stop our correspondence. Somehow it makes a definite ending to this long distance relationship that was going nowhere."

Valentina was surprised that I almost casually ended my contact with the boy with whom I was supposed to be in love. But I was not ready yet to tell her about my new feelings for Dyma.

On the evening of December 31, 1940 Valentina and I celebrated the arrival of the New Year in the dormitory study hall, where all students gathered that evening. And on the first of January we were invited by our friend Tanya to her house and stayed there all afternoon enjoying her mother's sweets. The next week our first semester exams

were starting and we had to study hard to receive the good grades.

Both Valentina and I had passed all our first semester final exams with the flying colors.<sup>1</sup> On the oral exams the students received their questions written on the examinations sheets and were allowed some time to prepare themselves while waiting for their turn to be examined by the instructor. When we came for the exam in higher mathematics, the instructors of the practical exercises classes conducted the examinations but we were surprised that Professor Levin was at the head table. He didn't conduct the examinations himself but was listening to how the students were answering the questions. Occasionally he would ask some impromptu questions himself.

When my turn came to be examined and I answered all the questions that were on my examination sheet, Professor wrote on the sheet of paper an algebraic formula and asked me to name the shape of its graphic representation. I promptly answered, "Parabola." He wrote another one, and I answered again without hesitation, "Hyperbola."

After the third one, which I also answered as quickly as the first two, he said, "Ve-ry go-o-d. Tell me how you remember them so well?"

I answered, "Well, when my friend and I did the assignments that were given to us from that little exercise booklet, we were so curious to find out what graphic curves would come from the other formulas, we did all the exercises in that booklet."

Professor Levin smiled and said approvingly, "I cannot give you a lesser grade than 'Excellent.'"

I exited the examination room almost triumphant to have received such a good grade from Professor Levin himself. When I recounted this to my good friend Valentina, who was waiting for me in the hall, she said, "It was worth it to be curious and work on those exercises, as we did! Now you have established an excellent reputation with Professor Levin and with our instructor in practical exercises in mathematics. This means that they will not be as strict with you for the duration of the course."

"Maybe it will be just the opposite—maybe they will expect from me more than from someone else," I replied, doubtful of her assumption.

I also had "Excellent" in descriptive geometry and "Good" in physics, and "Passed" in all practical exercises classes and laboratories in physics, chemistry, mechanical drafting, German, and gymnastics in which the grades were based on the averages received during the semester. Thanks to patient coaching by my good friend Valentina, I didn't fail the Foundation of Marxism-Leninism. Indeed, both Valentina and I qualified for the stipend and for the free tuition for the second semester.

I was very frugal with the money that my father gave me and had enough left not only to buy a train ticket to go home for the winter vacation, but also to buy gifts for my parents. Before departing home, I bought several kilograms of sugar and other staples that we had a shortage of in our town and had to stay for in long lines when the products did arrive in the store. In Moscow they were much easier to find.

At the end of the third week of January, 1941 I arrived home for a two week winter vacation. My father encountered me at the rail station and was wondering why my luggage was so heavy. My parents were very surprised to receive my gifts because my father hadn't expected that I would be so frugal in spending the money he gave me. Of course, they were very proud of my successful half-year at the Institute. But the biggest surprise for them was that with my grades I was able to receive the stipend and

didn't have to pay tuition for the second semester.

I wanted to see my friends<sup>1</sup> from school right away. First of all, I went to see my girlfriend Syma Shyrman. She was home and we had a very sentimental reunion after six months of not seeing each other. She hadn't qualified to take the entrance exams for any institute and was attending Medical *Technicum*, from which her sisters could eventually help her to transfer later to the Medical Institute without taking the entrance exams. She told me that she was dating a nice Jewish boy and was very happy with their relationship; most important, her parents liked him also. We reminisced about the good old days we had together and shared our hopes for the future.

Yasha Voronov was not at his uncle's home, as he had gone to visit his mother. But his uncle told me that he was also attending the *Technicum*. Nobody had any news from Kostya Syrota and no one knew his address. All they knew was that he was attending the Naval Academy in Leningrad.

I was also lucky to find my friend Musya Davidenko, who had come home on the winter vacations from Kharkov, where she attended the Kharkovsky Medical Institute. We saw each other a couple of times and shared our impressions about life away from home. She confided that after a half-year of living in a big city and among the students of the Institute, she didn't have the same admiration that she had before for her boyfriend Nikolay Dyeryuzhkin; he had remained to be the secretary of the Komsomol in our Ten-Years-School. Vacations passed very quickly and I had to say good-bye to my friends and to my parents.

On February 7, 1941 I returned to Moscow and began the second semester of studies at the Power Institute. Now Valentina and I had additional incentive to earn good grades that would qualify us to receive the stipend and free tuition for the next school year, and we worked even harder than we had before. Our studies remained strictly concentrated in the subjects important for the engineering field with lectures and practical exercises classes in higher mathematics, physics, chemistry, German, mechanical drafting, and the theoretical mechanics. Of course, we had a required class in the Theory of the Marxism-Leninism that I couldn't stand, but Valentina patiently coaxed me to study by persuading me with a very powerful incentive, "Olga, if you want to earn a stipend for next year, you must have a good grade in this subject too!"

Then we had a compulsory physical education class that I liked very much and which gave us a respite from the heavy concentration in the academic subjects. During the winter we had cross country ski lessons in Gorky Park with all the equipment provided to the students by the Institute. And toward the spring we resumed the exercises in gymnastics at the Institute's gymnasium, where this time we worked on various types of gym equipment. It was at one of those lessons when we had to jump over the padded horse that I landed badly and injured my left knee. My knee became swollen and the nurse told me to use alcohol compresses on it and gave me an excuse from attending the gym classes. My knee remained tender for a long period of time and I was excused from gymnastics for the rest of the school year.

As a result of the new regulations about the student's eligibility for the stipend and tuition, many young men from the first, second, and even the third year of studies had transferred to the military academies and among them were several of our male classmates. About two-thirds of the first year enrollment now were females. But Dyma and Misha remained at our Institute and our circle of friends didn't change. Valentina

and I were helping them in mathematics and physics, as we had before, especially Dyma, who had less time to study because he now had to work more hours during the day than he did during the first semester, to cover the additional tuition expense.

Although I had been in love with Dyma Karklin for some time, I did not tell Valentina or Tania, fearing that it would somehow change the harmony in our circle of friends, which until that time had remained untouched by sentimental attachments and was strictly a healthy friendship. One night when Valentina and I were working late on our drafting projects and there was nobody but us in the dormitory study hall, I confessed to her that I had fallen in love with Dyma. She listened to me and commented only that he was indeed a very nice boy. "But," I complained, "He doesn't give any signs of having anything more than a friendship toward me."

Valentina said something like, "That's how it should be in our circle of friends."

Since that night I was opening my soul and was talking about my hopes that one day Dyma would reciprocate my love. On some other nights I was complaining about my suffering to Valya and she was mostly listening and sometimes sympathizing and supporting me with a few words, but she mostly listened in silence.

One night when our roommate Rita was sound asleep and we had just finished our assignments in mathematics, I began to complain in a more desperate tone about the seemingly neutral way that Dyma was treating me. Valentina was silently listening to me. Her silence somehow was too long and I suddenly felt that there was something behind that silence that I needed to know. I stopped in the middle of the sentence and looked very attentively into the eyes of my dearest friend Valya—the answer emerged by itself in my mind. I pronounced it slowly and distinctly pausing after each word, "Valya, you are also in love with Dyma."

Valya lowered her eyes and two lonely tears ran down on her cheeks. In a sorrowful voice she answered, "Olga, believe me, I didn't want to inflict a wound to your heart. Only for this reason I was silent."

Astonished with this revelation, I couldn't find words to reply to Valya's confession and slowly, like in a trance, I undressed myself and went to bed. But I couldn't sleep. All kinds of imaginary scenarios about what would now happen between Valentina and me were appearing in my mind. "Could we remain now friends? Would our friendship circle be affected?" I don't know what had stricken me more, the discovery of Valya's love for the same boy I loved, or the fear of a sudden breaking-off of our extraordinary friendship.

One thing that changed in me from that moment was that my unreciprocated love became even more painful and hopeless. I didn't ask Valentina if Dyma ever showed her, or told her that he loved her, or if she felt that their love was reciprocal. We just didn't talk anymore about him or our infatuation with him. Valentina and I continued to study together, as we did before, but that magic of openness that we had disappeared, and we could not have any more of those sincere bursts of confessions about our intimate feelings and hopes.

One day I went alone to visit our friend Tanya and asked her if Valentina had said anything to her about what had happened between the two of us. She said, "No. What did happen?" I recounted to her exactly how I came to the revelation that Valentina was also in love with Dyma.

Tanya was a very good friend of both of us, and being neutral in regard to the

tender feelings for Dyma, she told me, "In all this time that the five of us were friends together, I have never observed any signs that Valya and Dyma were behaving with each other more than just friends. And I haven't heard anyone in our class mention that they had detected any signs of affection between them."

And Tanya gave me very sage advice, "Give some time for your and Valya's emotions to cool down. Your strong friendship with each other should help you to overcome this. From what you tell me you continue to study together as before." She paused for a while and added, "I think that both of you should wait until Dyma gives some signs about his feelings. Maybe he is not infatuated with either one of you."

It was sometime in the spring that the Komsomol organization at the Institute had a drive to enroll more students as members. Valentina didn't change her mind that it was better for me not to become a member. But one day, two female third-year students encountered me in the dormitory hall and began to work on me to become a member of the Komsomol.

"We have your name as being a very good student who receives a stipend," one of them said to me, "but you are not listed as a member of the Komsomol. It's time for you to enroll before the end of the school year."

"This year for me is very important to dedicate all my time to study and to have good standing as a student," I replied. "I am not ready to take upon myself the duties that are required of a good member of the organization. I couldn't do it all, have time for studying, time for going to the required meetings, and time for conducting a load of activities that ought to be done for the Komsomol."

"That is the most absurd reason for not becoming a member!" said the other recruiter. "Don't you know that being a member of the Komsomol gives you also a better standing as a student?"

"I prefer to receive good grades by earning them by studying," I replied, "and not because I am being rewarded for being a member of the Komsomol."

"There is no use in convincing this stubborn girl to become a member," said the first recruiter. "She needs time to understand that it is in her interest to be a member." And they left disappointed with their unsuccessful attempt to enroll me.

I was very shaken by this confrontation with the representatives of the political branch of the Institute and asked Valentina if there could be some repercussions for me from my refusal. But she dismissed my fears and said that the recruiters who confronted me were eager to fulfill their quota assigned and that they couldn't do anything to damage my reputation as a good student.

On the first of May 1941 our Institute, like all of the Moscow schools, institutes, organizations, factories, offices, and other places of work, was participating in the May Day<sup>2</sup> Parade on the Red Square. All students at the Institute were warned that attendance was compulsory, and all secretaries of the Komsomol cells were ordered to report the names of those who were absent that day. Students, faculty, and employees of the Institute were ordered to assemble very early in the morning in order to arrive on time to the designated place where we had to join the other institutes in the parade. The paraphernalia of red flags, banners, and the portraits of the communist leaders were distributed to us at the Institute by members of the Komsomol. We marched a great distance across Moscow to reach the place where we would join the procession.

It was already afternoon when our column finally arrived at the entrance to Red

Square. The column of our Institute joined parallel with the columns of the other institutes to fill the width of Red Square. Everyone was marching in step with the loud music of brass bands and carrying numerous red flags with the large hammer and sickle symbol of the Soviet State, long banners with the communist slogans, and huge portraits of Stalin, Lenin, and Marx. We marched across Red Square passing in front of the Lenin's Mausoleum, on top of which were standing the leaders of the Communist Party, lazily waving their hands.

We had been on our feet from very early in the morning and by the time we crossed Red Square we were very tired, thirsty, and hungry, but nobody dared to complain, fearing that the Komsomol's eavesdroppers could have been everywhere. And ahead of us was a long line of other participants from the parade waiting to board the Metro and the streetcars to return to their destinations.

Notwithstanding all of these inconveniences, it could have been a very enjoyable and pleasant event for me on that warm and sunny spring day. But an uneasy feeling that it was compulsory, that I was forced to be there, spoiled it.

In May, on one of the days off, our group of friends decided to go to Gorky Park in the afternoon. Dyma had to work and he promised to join us as soon as he could. We walked on the alleys of the park and fed the ducks swimming in the Moscow River. When it was time to go to the Metro station to meet Dyma, we decided that only one of us should go to encounter him. The rest of us would wait on the bench that we found conveniently located near the river.

I promptly said, "Valentina, you go." But she magnanimously declined my suggestion and said, "No, you go, Olga." I couldn't refuse this opportunity to walk alone with Dyma.

As it was agreed, I stood on the upper level of the Metro station near the escalator watching the arriving passengers. Dyma was late and finally I saw him running fast toward the exit. He was in such a hurry that he fell before reaching the steps. I was embarrassed for him, but decided not to mention to him that I saw it. He greeted me and told me, "I am sorry for being late. Did you wait a long time for me?"

"It doesn't matter," I replied. "I am glad you could make it to join us."

"I hope that the others are not upset that I am late."

"I don't think so," I explained, "they are enjoying themselves in the park."

As we walked through the park, we talked casually as good friends about our common interests, nothing personal, and nothing that could have some special meaning of more than friendship. Being the two of us alone, which was very unusual, was an unique opportunity for him to show, or to say something that could have indicated his feelings if he liked me more than just as a good friend. But he didn't, he was just friendly as usual, but nothing more. Now I knew that my love was unreciprocated.

At the end of May the final exams for the second semester began with the German being held on the thirty-first and I got the grade of "Good". The next exam was on the sixth of June in the Theory of Marxism-Leninism, the subject I detested. As usual, I was complaining that it was a waste of time to memorize all the dates of the revolutionary and Communist party events and the quotes from the teachings of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. On the day before the exam, all the secretaries of the Komsomol cells were called for a meeting at the Institute. That day, Valentina came back to the

dormitory late in the afternoon and told me under a big secret that the instructor of this class had prepared them for all the questions that would be asked tomorrow on the exam. She opened her notes and said, "Don't complain any more. Memorize only the answers to these questions."

On the sixth of June we left our dormitory dressed in light clothes and white socks, happy that summer weather was here. Then, while we were taking the exams, we saw through the windows that it had begun to snow. The big white fluffy flakes were descending slowly and lazily on the ground, as if they were unsure that it was the right time and place for them to be. We waited for the streetcar and walked to the dormitory covered with snow, which was melting on our light clothing and making us wet and shivering from cold. When we arrived, our roommate Rita asked us, "Well, how did you do on your exams in the Theory of Marxism-Leninism?"

Valentina replied, "With all my coaching Olga got the grade of 'Good.'"

And I added, "But Valentina, of course, as a Komsomol member couldn't have had less than 'Excellent.'"

On the eleventh of June I passed the exam in theoretical mechanics with the grade of "Good". After that Valentina and I began to get ready for the exam in higher mathematics<sup>3</sup> that was to be held on the twenty-second of June.<sup>4</sup>

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1. See the chapters "The New Ten-Years-School in Slavyansk" and "True Friendship and First Love."

2. International Labor Day.

3. Calculus.

4. June 22, 1941. See the chapter "Twenty-Second Of June 1941."

# Volume Two

*Volume Two is dedicated with love  
In memory of my dear parents  
My mother, Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky (1895-1999)  
And  
My father, Orest Mikhaylovich Gladky (1902-1983)*

*And  
In memory of my beloved husband,  
Giulio Verro (1915-1995)*

## **Part Seven**

### **The World War II In The Ukraine**



# Twenty-Second Of June 1941

By Olga Gladky Verro

On the twenty-second of June 1941<sup>1</sup> at eight o'clock in the morning, my friend and roommate Valentina Zakharova<sup>2</sup> and I were among the first to enter the examination classroom on the third floor of the old building at the Moscow Power Institute. We hoped to quickly finish the written exam in mathematics because during the school year neither of us had ever had a grade below "Excellent." On all written exams the students were allowed to leave the classroom as soon as they handed in the examination sheets to the instructors.<sup>3</sup>

But this time, for some unknown reason, when we finished and handed in our exam papers, the instructors didn't allow us or any other student to leave the classroom; they told us to go back to our seats and wait until the end of the four-hour examination period.

Valentina and I just sat there looking at each other and observed what was going on in the classroom. We were surprised that our instructors were behaving in an unusually worried and restless manner; there was a tense and mysterious atmosphere at their table. Once in a while one of them would get out of the classroom and upon return would whisper something in the ears of the others, and they would shake their heads as in if disbelief and cast very serious glances at each other.

They were distracted so much that they didn't pay much attention to what was going on in the classroom and didn't watch as usual to see if students were cheating. Valentina was able to pass a paper with the problem solution to one comrade Komsomol<sup>4</sup> member and not one of the instructors noticed it. It was obvious that they had something else on their minds, not the examinations and not the students.

Finally, exactly at noon, our instructors collected the exam papers from those students who were still struggling with the problems and announced that everybody could leave the classroom. Valentina and I left happy that we had succeeded on the written exam in mathematics, which was one of the most important subjects in our major of electrical engineering.

As we were walking down the stairs, we encountered Fimka Zusmanovich, my schoolmate from the Ten-Years-School<sup>5</sup> in my hometown of Slavyansk, as he was going up. He stopped, saluted me, and asked, "Well, how did you react to the big news?"

"What big news?" I asked.

"What do you mean, 'what big news'?" he repeated with surprise. "Where have you been all morning?"

"We had our written exam in mathematics and came out of the classroom just now," I replied. "The instructors did not allow us to leave the classroom for four hours until twelve o'clock."

"Well," wondered Fimka, "didn't you listen to the radio in the morning?"

"No. We don't have a radio in our room and we didn't have the time to go to the dormitory's study hall," I answered, almost annoyed with his questions. "And what is this

'big news' anyway?"

Slowly, and with a grave expression on his face Fimka replied, "The war with Germany has started!"

"Really?!!" I exclaimed with genuine surprise.

Valentina grabbed my hand I held on the railing and emitted only a long fear-inspired sound, "O-o-oh!" Then resolutely said, "I have to run to the Komsomol office! See you later in the dormitory."

"What is the matter with her?" asked Fimka. "Why did she have to run so fast?"

"She is the secretary of the Komsomol cell<sup>6</sup> of our practical exercises class."

"A-a-h," said Fimka, understanding why she was hurrying and commented, "Well, she will be very busy from now on."

"If you have any news from home," I told him, "please let me know."

"All right," and he proceeded to climb the stairs to his exam room on the next floor.

I went slowly down and out of the building trying to collect my thoughts on what I should do now. "I shall seek my father's advice immediately," I thought and rushed to send him a telegram. Then I took the streetcar to our dormitory and went to the study hall to listen to the news on the radio. The news was foreboding: "In a surprise attack, the German fascists have broken the Soviet border in many places and are engaging the Red Army troops in fearsome fighting..." This was followed by the usual propaganda slogans and an appeal to all citizens to rally for the defense of the motherland.

There was a great variety in the opinions of students who were coming in and out of the study hall. Some were sure that the war would be over soon; others were convinced that there would be a long struggle; some were predicting gas warfare; many were suggesting that we should go home to be with our families.

Valentina returned to the dormitory in the evening after the meeting of all major and minor leaders of the Institute's Komsomol organization. She told our roommate Rita and me that there was an immediate order to students to finish all exams as soon as possible. It was expected that the non-Moscowite students would not be allowed to leave Moscow and all female students would be mobilized to work at the military factories in the city; the male students would be mobilized into the Red Army, or to dig trenches around the city.

"Wow!" I exclaimed, "Are the Germans marching so fast that the government expects them to arrive soon all the way to Moscow?!"

"Preparedness is the best defense," replied Valentina with the slogan that she had already picked up at the meeting of the Komsomol leaders.

There was also an order to have a complete blackout in the dormitory requiring us to cover our windows with blankets for the night and not let any light shine through. During the night we were awakened twice by air raid alarms and we had to go to the dormitory basement. Nobody knew if they were training alarms, or if there were really German airplanes flying toward Moscow. But the anti-aircraft guns were shooting for real, making an impressionable noise and fireworks in the sky. During the alarm I joined a group of non-Moscowite students who were concerned about being forced to remain in Moscow. We all wanted to go home and reunite with our families in this difficult time. Somebody suggested, "Since this order is not yet official, we should go to the Institute's office as soon as possible and request a certificate stating that we are students on

vacation until the fall semester—it is required for the rail tickets counter.”

But the Komsomol activists were mingling among the groups and interrupting any discussion of this kind. One of them came to our group and began to talk very loudly to suppress the voices of dissidents. “Comrades, those among you who start these discussions obviously want to desert from your duties to our motherland and to the Communist Party. We all have to go and work in the factories producing weapons for the war. We all have to contribute! It is our duty as members of the Komsomol.”

Somebody in the group timidly said, “I am not a member.” The activist was quick to give her an answer, “Those who are not yet the members should take this occasion to become members of Komsomol, to be better organized and to give all of your strength to the Communist Party. Yes, all your strength!”

With so many of these Komsomol watchdogs moving around no one could continue to discuss matters that could be considered as discontent. One by one students began to leave the groups or just to stand silently in the semidarkness of the basement. But we found out what we needed to know—get those certificates immediately.

Finally, the sirens announced the end of the air raid alarm and, as we were returning to our rooms, we could hear the continuous noise of heavy vehicles rolling outside on the street. We went into the courtyard to find out what was going on, but the military guards didn’t allow us to go near the street. So we went back to our rooms, but we couldn’t see much from the windows. Without lighting on the street we could detect only the shadows of slowly moving huge vehicles and an unusual sound. After long discussion we fell asleep with a troublesome feeling of the unknown waiting for us in the immediate future.

In the morning we could see from the second-story windows facing Lefortovskiy Val a continuous column of heavy tanks that were rolling slowly on the street. They were coming out of a simple wooden storage building in the fenced yard next to our dormitory, and then proceeding through the wooden gate to the street. It was obvious that this innocent-looking yard full of street maintenance equipment was a camouflaged exit from a huge underground tank depot; the tanks were driving out all night and the rest of the day. By observing this spectacle of might, the war became suddenly more real and ominous. Now I knew that I had to go home at any cost.

The next morning I received a telegram from my father with a short and simple message: “Finish all exams and immediately return home. Papa.”

Valentina and I prepared ourselves for the oral exams in physics by cramming all night and we finally fell asleep only in the wee hours of the morning. We were glad to find at the examination table our physics instructor of the practical exercise class; he knew us very well, beginning with the institute’s entrance examinations. We said to each other, “It will be easy—he shall not be too strict with us.” But when I had to answer the questions that were on my exam sheet, I was not able to answer the most elementary questions.

“What is the matter with you?” my instructor asked. He shook his head as in disbelief that I didn’t know such simple answers. “What time did you go to sleep last night?”

“After four o’clock this morning,” I replied.

“If I was your father, I would have given you a good scolding,” he said and added,

"Go home and go to sleep. And don't study anymore. Come tomorrow morning well rested and take the exam with a fresh mind. I will mark that you were not able to take the exam this morning."

Valentina was lucky to get her answers right and she passed the exam with a grade of "Excellent."

"I couldn't think," I said to her, "my brain was completely blank."

The next morning I took my oral exam in physics with another instructor who didn't know me at all and received "Excellent" on my examination sheet. The rest of the exams were finished without enthusiasm or rigorous preparations. It all seemed so unimportant in the perspective of the war.

I procured from the institute's office the needed certificate,<sup>7</sup> but soon found out that it was almost impossible to depart from Moscow because too many people were trying to leave. There were long lines at all the ticket counters and one could never know what tickets were being sold at a particular counter. I envied my friend Zoya Litvinova,<sup>8</sup> who was in her second year at Moscow's Institute of the Foreign Languages. She had finished her exams one week before the war had started and departed for home right away.

I went to look for Fimka in his dormitory and found him in the students' study hall.

"Are you still here?" I asked.

"And where am I supposed to be?" he replied.

"In the army, or digging trenches," I replied, thinking about many boys from our institute who were already drafted.

"Well," he said with reluctance, "they are not yet drafting those who are not permanent residents of Moscow. I want to go home to see my parents first."

"To go home?" I wondered. "How do you hope to get tickets with all the people crowded at the rail station?"

"Well," he told me with a cunning smile of one who knows how to live by his own wits, "I have stayed several days at the rail station observing how they operate the ticket counters. There are two express trains going south. One is from Moscow and another that arrives from Leningrad early in the evening and goes all the way to Caucasia. They usually have only a small number of tickets to board this train in Moscow. Those tickets are sold in a hurry before the arrival of the train or while the train is staying a short time in the station. I saw that sometimes the passengers run with the tickets right from the counter to board the train."

I became excited and pleaded with him, "Fimka, you should show me the ticket counter where I can wait for it. Two nights ago I left some of my luggage in the baggage depository at the rail station. If I could only buy a ticket, I will be ready to go."

"You see, it is not as easy as you think," he answered. "There are two ticket counters that sell the tickets for that train and one never knows which one they will open that evening. Two persons are needed—one should stay at one counter and the other at another. Whoever would be at the right counter buys two tickets. You understand?"

"All right!" I exclaimed. "From this evening we shall start to stand in two lines at the ticket counters. But if they ask me for your student certificate?"

"Tell them that your young brother was here visiting and now you are both going home."

"You are full of tricks, Fimka," I commented.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked me. "You are an intelligent girl, but in difficult moments you are not capable of finding a way out!"

"You see, Fimka, I am a Ukrainian and you are a Jew. Who knows how you Jews are able to be so shrewd and find out the solution to difficult situations. We Ukrainians can't be compared to you Jews in these matters."

"It's probably a trait developed in our people through the ages as a means for our survival," he answered proudly.

One week passed by without luck, as Fimka and I were waiting every evening at the station at the two ticket counters. My fear and anxiety of not being able to get on the train and go home were becoming stronger every day. Valentina and I had very little time to see or talk to each other. She was busy all day at the Komsomol office and was sleeping when I returned home at night, and I was sleeping in the morning when she was leaving.

Our friendship was based on our intellectual affinity and common interest in mathematics and physics and it was sustained by our enthusiasm in solving problems and completing the assignments. Eventually it led us to sharing our intimate thoughts about our long-ings for love and our infatuations with one special boy. But, after I found out that she was in love with the same boy that she knew I loved, our friend Dyma Karklin, we stopped sharing our intimate thoughts and lost much of the closeness that we had before. The beginning of the war put us apart even more. Now she was all involved in the Komsomol activities for war preparedness and I was only interested in finding a way to get home as soon as possible. Suddenly we had lost all common interests and I felt that our friendship was quickly falling apart.

At the end of the week there was an order from a dormitory office to free our rooms, and we had to find another place to live because the buildings would be used to house the drafted men. I packed my comforter, pillow and nonessential items to take for safekeeping to my schoolmate Lena Tarasenko;<sup>9</sup> she now lived with her parents in Moscow. I had visited her a couple of times and we had established a good relationship; I was hoping that one day I could get my things back. When I finished packing I could hardly lift that huge bundle.

To get to Lena's I had to first take a streetcar and then the Metro, which had a station very close to her apartment complex. One young man in military uniform saw that I was dragging my bundle on the floor and helped me to get it out of the Metro train and up the stairs to the exit.

Thick fog was filling the air and I couldn't see more than a few meters ahead. I couldn't orient myself and was afraid that I would not find the apartment complex. The thick fog camouflaged the multistory brick buildings and all looked alike. Finally, somebody who lived there helped me to find the right building number and I dragged my bundle up several flights of the stairs to Lena's apartment. She and her parents were surprised to see me and insisted that I stay overnight and return to my dormitory in the morning.

I told Lena and her parents how Fimka and I were trying to get the tickets for the train to return home. They approved that it was the right thing for me to do to return to Slavyansk and stay with my parents during the war. I slept with Lena in her bed and we talked long into the night remembering our school days, her cousin Musya Davidenko,

and we shared our fears about the unknown future that was ahead of us. Lena told me that she had enrolled in the Aeronautics Institute not because she was interested in specializing in aeronautics, but because she hoped to find a handsome pilot and marry him. But now all of her dreams had fallen apart because all able-bodied young men were quickly mobilized; only the girls and the men disqualified from military service were remaining at the institute. In the morning we embraced each other and said good-bye wishing that the war would be over soon.

When I returned to the dormitory, our mattresses had already been taken to the storage room and we had to sleep on the bed's metal spring. Valentina gave me one of her blankets to put on the spring and I used some folded piece of clothing as a pillow.

One afternoon a few days later, I had a terrible headache. I was lying on my bed facing the wall to keep the light from bothering my eyes. I was trying to rest before going with Fimka to the rail station. Somebody knocked on the door. Without getting up, I said, "Come in," and turned my head only to see who it was. It was Dyma Karklin.<sup>10</sup>

"Hello," he said, "I am sorry to disturb you. Where is Valentina?"

His asking right away about Valentina was like an arrow in my heart. I was hurt that he hadn't come to see me. I turned my face back toward the wall and answered him coldly, "She is, as usual at this time of the day, somewhere with the Komsomol activists." And I added in a suffering voice, "Please excuse me for not getting up, I have terrible headache."

"I am sorry that you don't feel well," he told me gently and asked, "Do you mind if I wait for her? I would sit here quietly on the chair."

"It is all right with me," I answered deliberately with indifference. "But you have to wait for several hours; she is returning very late in the afternoon."

"No, I cannot wait that long. I will try to come tomorrow," he answered with disappointment.

"If you want to leave her a message," I said, "there is a pencil and paper on the table." Then I thought that maybe it was the last time I was seeing him and added in a soft voice, "I am not sure if I will see her tonight because I am going to the rail station hoping to depart home, that's if I am lucky enough to get tickets."

Dyma got up and said, "Well, good luck to you for tonight." And patting me gently on my shoulder added, "And good-bye. If I don't see you tomorrow, I will know that you departed home."

Without turning my face toward him, I answered, "Thank you. Good-bye, Dyma."

That night again Fimka and I couldn't get tickets. This time, when I returned to my room I woke up Valentina and told her that Dyma was looking for her and that he would be back tomorrow afternoon.

"I wonder why he was not working today," she said. "I will try to return sooner tomorrow." We didn't discuss him anymore. She asked me if it had again been an unsuccessful night at the train station. Then she said in a businesslike manner that if we went there every night, eventually we would succeed.

The next day both our friends Dyma and Misha came to our room. They told us that they came to say good-bye. While they were waiting for a military draft, they were mobilized to dig the trenches around Moscow and were departing the next morning.

"It is hard for me to leave my small sister and old grandmother. I don't know how they will do on their own without me," said Dyma and emitted a deep sigh. "But what can

I do? I received the card to present myself tomorrow morning at the exact time at the place of departure. If I don't go, I will be considered a deserter. Nobody knows who is in charge of it. In the *Militsia* Precinct they told me that they don't know where I could go and complain about it. They just said to go tomorrow morning and talk to whoever is in charge of the group."

Sitting at the table Dyma placed his head between the palms of his hands, as if he wanted to squeeze the solution to his problem from his brain. After a while he explained, "You probably don't know that shortly before the war with Finland<sup>11</sup> began my father and mother disappeared from their work-place. Their coworkers told us that NKVD<sup>12</sup> agents arrested them. We suspected that they were arrested because their national origin was Finnish. We hoped that the worst that happened to them was being sent to the concentration camp in Siberia. We didn't know anything about them until recently, when one man, who by sheer miracle came out of their concentration camp, brought us a short note from my parents. They wrote that they were alive, but that we should not expect them to return home soon." With a big sigh Dyma concluded, "What I can do against the impossible odds?"

Valentina, who was listening in silence, said, "Dyma, give me your address," and she handed him a piece of paper and pencil. "I will try to go and see your little sister and your grandmother." Then she reassured him, "If I can help them, I will."

Dyma thanked her and wrote his address.

All this time Misha, as usual, was sitting very quietly; one never knew what he was thinking about. But one could see that he was more pensive than usual and in low spirits.

I felt sorry for the boys and couldn't keep myself from crying. Valentina said to me with reproach, "Olga, stop whimpering, the boys are going to do their duty." Then, turning to the boys, she concluded solemnly, as if she was closing a meeting of the Komsomol cell, "Good-bye boys! Take care of yourselves!" And, since the boys weren't getting up, she prompted them, "Up! Up! Write to us and keep us informed about your whereabouts."

Dyma and Misha slowly got up and shook our hands while saying, "Good-bye!" "Good-bye!" And they left.

I was disappointed with Valentina's attitude, which kept the last visit of our friends almost formal and didn't allow much sentimentality. We didn't even embrace or hug each other, just shook hands, and they were gone. I felt sad, weak, and confused and sat on my bed as if in a trance. It all seemed to be so unreal. I thought that other boys from our dormitory were also disappearing fast. Some came to say good-bye; others just vanished without a trace. Only the girls remained.

At that moment I was called downstairs to receive a telegram. It was again from my father. He probably was not sure if I had received the first one. I came back to our room and read it to Valentina: "Finish exams and return home. Papa."

She answered reassuringly but without reproach, "You, Olga, don't have the Komsomol spirit. It is better that you go home."

In a few days the messenger from the office of the Secretary of Komsomol came to the dormitory, knocked on all rooms, and gave an order to immediately go to the lecture hall in the main building of the institute, "You will be assigned for work in the factories."

I remained in my room hoping that she was gone. After a while she knocked at my door again. "Why are you still here?" she asked me angrily.

"I cannot go because I received a telegram to return home immediately."

"What are you talking about? There is nothing more important than your duty to serve your country. You cannot refuse to go to work." She pointed harshly toward the door, "Ma-a-rch! If you hurry you can still make it on time." And she pushed me out of my room.

I hurried down the stairs, but went to Fimka's dormitory and told him what had happened.

"They will be placing only the girls in the factories. The boys will be drafted soon. It's time for us to move fast," he said. "Go back to your room, lock the door, and don't answer to anybody until I come; then we will go to the railroad station. This afternoon we will go there earlier and maybe we will be among the first in line."

We stood in line all afternoon and into the evening. I was standing in line for the trains that were departing from Moscow, and Fimka for the trains that were arriving to Moscow from Leningrad and proceeding south. Once in a while one of the ticket windows opened and all who were close crowded in to hear what tickets were available. This time Fimka was very close to the ticket window. I saw that Fimka was second in line when the window opened. Then he was talking to the teller, and, finally, I could see him as he tried to get out through the crowd holding the tickets in his raised hand.

I ran toward him. "Have you succeeded?" I asked anxiously, not believing what I had seen.

"Yes, I got them," he answered, "but the train is arriving in a half-hour. We don't have time to take the streetcar to get our luggage from dormitory. I decided to leave it there."

"Maybe we can go in a taxi?" I suggested.

"We cannot risk being late for the train," he dismissed my idea.

"You are right," I agreed, "I will also leave it in the room. Valentina will take it. I will only take the luggage I have here at the station in the storage room. It really doesn't matter if I lose everything, as long as I go home."

We went to the telegraph office and wired telegrams to our parents that we were on our way home. Then we went on the platform to wait for the train; we were surprised to see that it was almost empty since only the passengers with tickets were allowed there.

When we boarded the train I thought, "I am really going home." And I felt like a huge heavy weight had fallen from my shoulders. In our compartment there was only one upper shelf free where one could sleep and Fimka climbed quickly up. I sat on the available seat below. During the night he allowed me to climb up for a while to take a short nap.

The train did not travel according to schedule. Everywhere the priority was for the military trains, and ours had to wait for hours in the large stations. Only early in the morning of the second day of traveling did we reach Slavyansk Station. Our train was more than ten hours late.

It was dawn. My father had waited the whole night at the station and looked tired. The embrace was long and in silence. "My dear *Lyalyechka*," my father finally said, "I was already losing hope that you could pull yourself out of the grip of Moscow!"

"If it weren't for Fimka," I answered, "and for his Jewish wit, I would not be here today. He was able to figure out how to outsmart the Soviet bureaucracy to get us out of there..."

Fimka couldn't find his father, who had probably decided that we couldn't get on the train and left. We took the first local branch train Vyetka into town. At parting, my father thanked Fimka for helping me come home.

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1. The date the war between Germany and the Soviet Union started.
  2. See the chapter "Moscow's Power Institute."
  3. Olga Gladky Verro, *Quando Incominciata la Guerra* [in Italian], MS., (Turin, Italy, 1956). Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro, ed. and trans. by the author.
  4. See the chapter "Moscow's Power Institute."
  5. See the chapter "True Friendship and First Love."
  6. See the chapter "Moscow's Power Institute."
  7. From a copy of the certificate dated July 2, 1941.
  8. See the chapter "Moscow's Power Institute."
  9. Idem.
  10. Idem.
  11. In 1938 the Soviet Union attacked Finland. See the chapter "Becoming Conscious of My Political Views."
  12. People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs.

## The War Comes Closer to Home

By Olga Gladky Verro

In my hometown of Slavyansk the frenzy of the war began to turn everything upside-down. The general mobilization by the army of all able-bodied young men was going on as quickly as they were able to process them. There was also a mobilization of younger boys and girls to dig trenches on the outskirts of the town as a defense against the German tanks.

I went to the office of NKVD for residency registration<sup>1</sup> on the eighth of July 1941 but after that my father ordered me to stay in the house and not to go anywhere. Although the Germans were far away in the Western Ukraine, recently annexed to the Soviet Union from Poland, in our town some preparations had already begun for an evacuation of equipment and key personnel from the major factories.

But the most terrible news was that the NKVD was snatching at the unusual pace many political suspects. Each day one could hear the names of those who had disappeared without a trace into the cellars of the hated People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs.

Another exceptional phenomenon was that most of the Jews were leaving their possessions and escaping, or more acceptably, "evacuating" to the internal parts of the Soviet Union. The rumors were that the Germans were rounding up Jews and shooting whole families. The rest of the population didn't believe these rumors and the general opinion was that it was an excuse for the Jews to run away to safer locations and to

evade digging trenches and undergoing other hardships of the war.

One day when I dared to go to the market, I encountered on the street my best school girlfriend Syma Shyrman, who was a Jew. She was glad to see me but at the same time sad about having to say good bye. She said they were lucky to have found a way to load their furniture on the train, and they were leaving the next day for Orenburg, a town deep in the interior of Russia. When I told her I thought that it was probably not true that they would be killed by the Germans, Syma told me that they knew from the most reliable Jewish sources that, regrettably, it was true, and that they had no choice but to save themselves by fleeing as far away as they could. I wished her good luck and we embraced. It was the last time I saw Syma.

All young boys of our age were sent to the front as soon as they were drafted without wasting time for military training. This happened to many boys from our school; among them was my and Syma's school friend and my neighbor Yasha Voronov,<sup>2</sup> who left for the front line shortly before I returned from Moscow.

Not even one month later, his uncle with whom he lived received a notice that Yasha was lost in action. His aunt Fanya worked at the hospital where every day the wounded arrived from the front. She asked all of those who could speak, "Did you know Yasha Voronov?" And she would describe how he looked and how tall he was.

One day a wounded young man who was from our town told her, "Sister, I knew Yasha. I was with him when he died. Don't let his mother know the details of his tragic death. It happened so quickly. After we were dressed in military uniforms and they had showed us how to use guns, we were put on trucks that drove us toward the front line. It was a very long column of trucks driving on the dusty road between the potato fields. We were still very far from the front line. Suddenly German airplanes appeared in the sky and started to dump bombs. And, as if that was not enough, they also opened machine-gun fire. Everybody jumped out of the trucks. Some, like me, who right away threw themselves on the ground, were able to save themselves. But Yasha decided to run farther away from the road. During the explosion of one of the bombs, we saw Yasha's body fly high in the air and after the airplanes were gone, we found parts of his body dispersed all over the field. We collected what we could find, wrapped them in his military coat, and buried him in the middle of the potato field."

This was the first painful news of the war for my little heart. For the last two years in school Kostya Syrota and I had tutored Yasha and Syma in all subjects and were able to help them graduate. The four of us were very fond of each other and there was a bond of friendship and loyalty among us. I couldn't imagine Yasha being dead. I was glad that Kostya was finishing an accelerated course for officers in the Soviet Flot<sup>3</sup> in Leningrad. At least they were training them and not sending them to the slaughter at the front! I wrote to Kostya a letter describing the tragic death of our friend Yasha. I don't know if he received it, but I never received an answer from him.

Valentina wrote me only one letter in which she said that she was working at night in the ammunition factory and during the day was attending accelerated courses at the Power Institute. She didn't want to lose the time and this could help her to graduate sooner. She wrote that without me she didn't feel stimulated to study hard as we used to do together. Also it didn't help her being tired and her memory was not the same as it used to be. She didn't say one word about our friends, Dyma and Misha. I thought she probably didn't know anything about them at that time.

I felt lonely and nostalgic of those days when I was in the company of my friends from school or from the institute. At that time all young girls were hiding from being drafted to dig trenches, and I couldn't find anybody from my school to keep me company.

Fimka told me that he was returning to Moscow, where he was hoping to be accepted in the accelerated course at our Power Institute and maybe, as a student, to be deferred from the draft. I doubted that it was possible, but wished him luck. I told him that maybe he knew how to keep himself from being drafted the same way as he handled getting us train tickets from Moscow. But soon I heard that he had returned again to our town and after a couple of weeks departed back to Moscow. This way he was evading the rules of registering with the draft boards here and there.

I had mixed feelings about Fimka's trickery in evading the draft. On one side, I was sympathetic to his desperate attempts to save himself from being sent to the slaughter, yet on the other side, I resented his trickery while Yasha and many others boys from our school were drafted, wounded, and even killed. Soon his parents evacuated somewhere behind the Ural Mountains and I didn't hear anything about him anymore. Many years later I found out that he was also killed in the war.

Toward the end of July 1941 my mother's older brother Nikolay<sup>4</sup> arrived in Slavyansk. With him were also his wife, Katya, his older son Nikolay's wife, Lidia, and a baby son, Boris.<sup>5</sup> My uncle and his family had evacuated in a hurry from Stanislav<sup>6</sup> after the Germans launched a surprise attack on the Polish and Western Ukraine border.

Uncle Nikolay came to see us on the first day that he arrived in our town. Since he had just arrived from the Western Ukraine, which was close to the front, he had a lot to tell us, and we were all curious to hear about what was going on at the front line. Everybody knew that Soviet radio and newspapers weren't telling the truth; as usual, they were telling only blatant propaganda. People had to rely more on the rumors passed by word of mouth by those who were coming from the Western provinces, by those who saw or experienced themselves, or heard from others about what was really going on at the front. My father hoped that my uncle knew more than we did about the situation over there.

At the beginning my father was very cautious not to expose me to the anti Soviet opinions of my uncle, who was not afraid to talk in my presence. I knew that my father was trying to protect my uncle, himself, and me. The NKVD was still very active in our town and many people we personally knew had disappeared quite recently; therefore, any one of us could be grabbed by their paws. But Uncle Kolya<sup>7</sup> convinced my father that I was old enough to know what was going on and what to expect in the near future.

I knew my uncle very little, because I had seen him only once or twice when I was very young. As I listened to my uncle, I thought he and my father would get along very well. My uncle was a man of old traditions, he hated the Bolsheviks, and remembered with nostalgia the good old times of the Czar; this was enough to make my father appreciate him.

My father was working as a proofreader at the local newspaper at night and he had plenty of time during the day to sit and listen to his brother-in-law. My father, mother, and I sat in the kitchen close to each other like conspirators and pricked up our ears to hear what my uncle Kolya was telling us almost in a whispering tone of voice. It created an atmosphere of mystery, because our house was located deep in the

courtyard and nobody could hear anything on the street even if one would scream.

My uncle was confirming many things that we had already heard from the rumors that reached our town. He told us it was true that Germans were moving forward at full speed. The soldiers that were returning home recounted that the Red Army was completely unprepared for the war and that the generals were sending the young men in just with guns in their hands to fight the German tanks. With a trembling voice my uncle said, "Only thinking about this my heart is hurting for my two sons who were among the first ones to be drafted. My only hope is that both have graduated from the Kharkovsky Physical Education Institute and this means that they would not be just simple soldiers, but would be placed in command of some military units. Let's hope that the Almighty God will protect them."

There was a moment of silence as my uncle Kolya was recuperating from his emotional state. Then he continued to tell us what he had heard about events on the front. "In addition to the carnage that the young recruits are condemned to by the generals, the Ukrainian soldiers don't want to fight on their own soil, so they raise their hands and surrender, or just desert and run away home."

As to what was happening on the other side of the front occupied by the Germans, my uncle said that what he had heard was mostly hearsay passed from mouth to mouth by those people who found a way to cross from one side of the front to another, mostly to return home or to their relatives. The most widely spread rumor was that the Germans promised to return the land that was taken from the peasants by the Soviets, as much land as they wanted to cultivate. For this reason in the Ukrainian villages the peasants were greeting Germans with bread and salt, the Ukrainian custom of welcoming important people. and rejoicing that finally liberation from the Red Devil had arrived. "No wonder *muzhiks* give Germans such hospitality and support," he concluded.

Then my uncle added with enthusiasm in his voice, "But most impressive of all for the population is that in the villages and towns occupied by the Germans they allow people right away to reconstruct the churches that the Red antichrist transformed into clubs and movie theaters." He had heard that in the occupied towns the Germans immediately started reconstructing the factories and electric power stations, which the Soviets had blown up. Also, the Germans quickly established law and order; they introduced a rationing system and regulated distribution of bread for the working people.

Then Uncle Kolya said that there were some stories that were very sad, "It seems to be true that Germans shoot all Jews. Nobody knows why they do that. And, although the mass executions are abhorrent to most people, the Ukrainian populace does not decry it openly, because anti-Semitism still exists and an old prejudice against the Jews that has survived for centuries is hard to eradicate. But the Jews got the word about this danger from the Germans and most of them are escaping or evacuating as far into the interior of Russia as they can."

He continued to tell that in all towns that he traveled through the situation was the same: all Communist Party bosses, Soviet officials, and directors of all kinds of factories, mills or other industrial and commercial establishments, and all heads of political organizations were evacuating their families in a hurry into the far regions of Russia. Many factories were dismantling the machinery, loading it on the trains, and shipping it all behind the Ural Mountains. The technical schools and the institutes were

also packing and moving the essential laboratories, books, and documents to assigned destinations. All that could not be taken with them was to be blown up. My uncle concluded, "It appears that the Red Army has no intentions of defending Ukraine. All they are doing now is slowing down the advance of the Germans to have the time to move as much of the industry as possible into the interior regions and to evacuate those who will be in charge of it in the new place."

Then he added with irony in his voice, "Only the general population remains in their homes, in their villages, hamlets, towns, and cities. They wait patiently for the Soviet authorities, Communist Party bosses, and NKVD agents to leave. Common people are waiting for the Germans, hoping they will be the liberators from the Bolsheviks' oppression."

After my uncle had finished telling all he knew, he and my father listened to the radio bulletins in Russian, Bulgarian, and Polish from Bulgaria and Poland to find out and to mark on the map how far the Germans had advanced. My father would compare this information with that printed in the local newspaper where he worked; returning home he would comment with disgust, "Lies, lies, blatant lies! The same Soviet propaganda!"

During the months of July and August Soviet authorities in our town were trying to maintain an appearance of national emergency and preparations to defend our town. They continued to send brigades to dig trenches around the town under the command of lower ranking communists, who didn't know anything about military strategy or topography. It didn't matter where they were digging; all that they were concerned with was how many meters their brigade had dug in a day. The agents of the NKVD were obsessed with finding spies, traitors, and saboteurs. They relentlessly arrested suspects, and every day one could find out the new names of those who were taken from their homes at night. Everybody who didn't plan to evacuate continued to work in the same place as before. Law and order were maintained. There was a shortage of those foods that had to be brought from other places on the railroad, because priority was given to the military shipments and to evacuation trains.

The Germans were advancing very fast. By the beginning of September the rumors were that Kiev and Kharkov were already in their hands, but there was no official confirmation in the newspapers or on the radio. In Slavyansk all top Communist bosses had evacuated their families; most Jewish families departed too, and rumors were spreading about the factories being prepared with explosives to be blown up. My uncle Igor told us that this was true in the Soda Factory where he worked.

About that time we received a telegram from my mother's sister Nyusya, who was in Mongolia on a medical expedition<sup>8</sup> to provide medical care to the Mongol population in the remote areas. She wrote: "Flying to Kazan with my daughter Svetlana. Nyusya." It was the first time we had heard she had a daughter, and it was the last time that we heard from her.

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1. From the passport page.

2. See the chapter: "True Friendship and First Love."

3. Navy.

4. See the chapter "Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy."

5. See the chapter "Volodya and Kotik Are Growing Up."

6. Town of Stanislavov, Western Ukraine was annexed to Soviet Union from Poland in 1939.

7. Nickname for Nikolay.

8. See the chapters "Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya" and "Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria Outbreak."

## Three Days Of Anarchy

By Olga Gladky Verro

One night in the first days of November my father returned from the newspaper office earlier than usual. He said that his boss, comrade Mukhin, was in a hurry to close the printing house that evening. He gave the keys to Maria Sergeyevna Litvinova<sup>1</sup> and asked her to come early in the morning to open the printing house and to distribute the newspapers to the vendors.

During the night we heard a lot of movement of vehicles on the main roads and heard some explosions; then we could see in the sky the glow of a fire in the direction of the Slavyansk Station. Then everything became very quiet as if the whole world were suddenly standing still.

Very early in the morning, when we woke up, the town was enveloped in an eerie calm and silence. The first courageous people who dared to venture on the streets found out very quickly that the town had been abandoned by the Soviet authorities, by *Militsia*, by NKVD, and by the military. The news spread rapidly around the town, and suddenly the streets were full of people who knew that there was no one in charge. Anarchy is a very scary thing; all restraints that keep human behavior in check become broken and savage instincts take over without fear of consequences.

The glow in the sky that we had seen during the night came from a grain storehouse that caught fire after the explosion and was still smoldering. The grain was scattered in the storehouse yard and on the adjacent street. The population of the town and vicinities rushed there with all kinds of containers: bags, boxes, and carts. To have grain meant to have bread and everyone was thinking about having enough of it for the unknown future. My mother and I took two sacks and followed the stream of people to get what we could find. My mother insisted that my father remain in the house because there were rumors that at the last moment all men are rounded up and taken into the Red Army. There were a lot of people at the grain storehouse yard. Everybody filled their containers with grain, took them home, and returned many times for more. We filled our sacks half-full according to what we could carry on our backs and returned only once. When all the clean grain was gone the remaining grain, that was hot and half-burned, was taken.

Those who lived close by, like my mother's cousin Khrystyia, filled rooms, cellars, and shacks with the grain—they knew that grain was more precious than gold. The next day one could not find even a single kernel on the ground around the still smoldering pieces of a roof and blackened by smoke cement columns, which remained as witnesses of the tragic end of the grain storehouse.

After the grain was all gone, it was time to ransack the rest of the town. All stores, shops, and offices were plundered with the savagery that only anarchy could bring. One

could not observe such behavior in people on any other occasion. I remember seeing what happened in the office supply store, which was only around the corner from our street. The mob had smashed the large heavy glass store window that now had a huge hole with sharp, pointed edges. It allowed easy entry if one would bend forward. Somebody from the inside opened the door and I entered the store with others. But the spirit of wickedness enticed some men to enter through the hole in the window, as if they defied the commonly accepted entryway by thinking, "Hey, this is one time in my life that I can enter through the window. Why not try it? Here I am!"

Everyone quickly assessed the merchandise on the shelves evaluating its worth, "What kind of goodies I can find here? What is in this bottle? The ink? I don't need it." And the bottle of ink was thrown on the floor. "What is this? Glue. I might need it." And several bottles of glue were pocketed. If there were items on the shelf that were not needed, some men would scoop it wildly in one sweep onto the floor. One man grabbed a bunch of long wooden rulers; another one, a stack of note-books. And one huge man found a heap of blotter paper and loudly announced walking with it out the door, "This will come handy! It will be soft to clean my ass!" One woman was happy to take one big box of pens and pencils. And someone was throwing erasers through the hole in the window at the crowd outside.

Closer to the center of town the crowd invaded the Town's Soviet<sup>2</sup> offices. From the open windows of the first and the second floor all kinds of papers were flying out. The November wind whirled them up and down like flocks of birds, finally depositing them on the street, which began looking all white as if it were covered with snow. People were carrying desks, chairs, bookcases, and cabinets from the offices. But most people were searching for food in the food stores. However, they found empty shelves there because the store employees had already cleaned everything out several days before.

In one storehouse with few windows, some men had discovered cases with bottles that in semidarkness they believed to be vodka, but their joy quickly dissolved, as it was only mineral water. The men became so furious that they pushed the whole case out of the second story window. It landed on the sidewalk with a loud "Chia-f-f!" And for a few minutes the fizz from the effervescent water in the broken bottles hissed like as a huge snake, "Sh-sh-sh... Sh-sh-sh... Sh-sh-sh..."

One man came out with a bottle in his hand, broke the neck of the bottle against the edge of a concrete step, and said to himself, "E-e-hi-i, let's drink some of this water for the health of those..." And he inserted a couple of censored words. "They left us mineral water!" He took a big sip from the bottle and then tossed it against the wall shouting, "This rubbish can drink only those with weak stomach!"

On the side street toward the market several men broke down the heavy door of a basement warehouse. There were so many people waiting that not everyone could get inside. There, for some unknown reason, almost all kind of products remained intact: cases of laundry soap, bottles of sunflower oil, and other household items. It was a big find for the people who were disillusioned with the empty food stores. Each was taking as much of these heavy items as he could carry. Some would grab a case of soap, then leave it in the middle of the floor and run to grab a case with bottles of oil, or one with the rice.

But there were so many people that it was harder to get out than in. Men and

women pushed, screamed, and swore at each other, but while there was plenty to take they didn't fight. When only a few boxes remained, the stronger ones were snatching the cases from the hands of the weaker ones, as if it were their inherent right. All day and night there was continuous coming and going of people carrying everything and anything they could find. When they finished with the stores, warehouses, and public offices, they turned to the abandoned houses and apartments of the communist bosses, *militiionyers*, NKVD agents, and Jews. One could see people carrying mattresses, pillows, tables, chairs, and all kinds of household items that those who had fled in a hurry were not able to take with them.

On the third day the fury of plundering slowed down but now was the turn of searching and hauling with the carts all sorts of the heavy stuff, coal and wood for burning in the stoves. This was found in the basements and sheds of the abandoned houses, apartments, and in the yards of the mutilated by the explosions factories. It was tedious and heavy work, but everybody knew that winter was not far away.

After three days of looting most people calmed down and began taking time to make an inventory of the stuff that they had hauled home. All obvious places were cleaned out down to the last item that could be taken. The only place in town that was not violated by the mob was the NKVD headquarters. No one dared open the gate of that hated institution, fearing that it was booby-trapped.

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1. See the chapter "The Newspaper Proofreader."

2. Town Hall.

## Invaders Or Liberators?

By Olga Gladky Verro

After three days of anarchy and plunder in our town of Slavyansk, people began to take inventory of plundered goods. Some grabbed a case of soap, or a bag of sugar, or had good fortune in finding various goods in the homes and apartments abandoned by families of Communist Party members, Soviet officials, or Jews. But most didn't find everything they would need for their families during the uncertain time that everybody anticipated.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, on the fourth day after the Soviets retreated from the town, the people crowded the market with all kinds of goods. Nothing was for sale; nobody wanted to be paid in rubles, which suddenly became completely worthless. Commerce had reversed itself to the ancient form of barter. There were even some peasants who came from the nearby villages with eggs, milk, butter, sour cream, and some vegetables that were bartered for soap, sugar, clothing, or whatever else the town folks were offering and the peasants needed.

Those who came late displayed their merchandise on cloth spread on the ground, but those who came early displayed it on wooden tables fixed to the ground, for which they now didn't have to pay rent to the Town Soviet's collector. They patiently waited for

the barterers to approach them with offers. One would ask a middle-aged peasant woman, "Auntie, what do you want in exchange for a liter of milk, a cup of sugar, or a piece of laundry soap?" If the woman needed the merchandise, the exchange was made; if she wanted something else, she would wait for the right offers.

The market was not only a place where people could barter goods, it also was a forum where the latest news about the war was passed by word of mouth. That morning my mother and I also went to the market to find some dairy products from the peasants.

We were looking at the merchandise displayed on the market tables facing the Karl Marx Street. Suddenly, we became aware that the lively sounds of the bargaining people became subdued, and we saw that people were turning their heads in the direction of the street. At first we couldn't see what was going on over there, except that two men and a woman were standing in the middle of the road. Then we heard the murmur of voices coming in waves as the people passed the news from those who were standing closer to the street. Finally one word reached us: "Germans."

All eyes pointed in that direction. After a few minutes we saw a patrol of not more than twenty five or thirty German soldiers marching toward the center of town. From their slow pace one could infer that they were tired from walking a long distance. They had guns across their shoulders and military backpacks on their backs. They didn't show any signs of being worried about hostile reaction from the population. It seemed that they were used to finding the towns abandoned by the Red Army and the Soviet authorities and didn't expect any military resistance; on the contrary, it seemed that they were expecting a friendly reception from the Ukrainian population. In fact, the people at the market observed them with curiosity, but without hostility or fear, and some saluted them by waving their hands.

The two men and the woman standing in the middle of the street were waiting for the German column to come closer. The two men had removed their hats and were holding them in their hands, and the woman standing between them was holding a tray covered with a white embroidered rushnik;<sup>2</sup> on it was a round loaf of bread and a small saucer with salt, a Ukrainian custom of welcoming very important people or authorities.

The German officer who was walking ahead of the column stopped a few steps before the welcoming party and gave a command to his soldiers to stop. The two men and the woman bowed their heads and greeted them in Ukrainian, "*Dobro Pozhaluvat!*"<sup>3</sup> The officer shook hands with the two men and accepted the tray with the gift from the woman, saying in German, "*Danke schön!*"<sup>4</sup> Then he entrusted the tray to one of the soldiers and gave a command to resume the march toward the center of town. My mother and I rushed home to tell the news to my father, whom we hadn't allowed to go out on the street.

Later that morning more German troops entered the town and immediately set up their military headquarters, which they called *Kommandantur*. The military commanding officer was called *Kommandant*. In less than a week they established order in our town to a degree that only Germans are capable of. Right from the first day they posted the bulletins with the *Kommandant's* orders printed in Ukrainian. He ordered a sunset-to-dawn curfew and warned that any sabotage acts or partisan activities would be punishable by death.

One morning, a few days after the Germans' arrival in town, the people were

shocked to see three gallows with three hanged men on the Soborny Square. Attached to the gallows was a proclamation warning that anyone caught in partisan activity or the act of sabotage could expect the same end. The hanged men were left in public view for three days to provide an example for those who might dare to commit such acts. This incident scared the population who saw the consequences of defying German orders.

The news circulating by word of mouth was that those three men were either caught trying to blow up some place important to the Germans, or transmitting via radio to the partisan command. Also, they seemed to be a part of the small group of partisans left behind in town and were betrayed by somebody from their own group and reported to the Germans.

After this happened, the *Kommandant* gave the order to the population to take all their radios to the *Kommandantur*. My father was afraid to bring our radio there and provoke suspicion and we dropped it in the deep, cemented hole in the ground that had been prepared for the new outhouse. The hole was closed with a cement lid and was hidden between the raspberry bushes in our yard. We hoped eventually to recover the radio in better days, and in order to preserve it we packed it in a waterproof tablecloth and lowered it carefully with a cord to the bottom of the hole; then we secured the cord with the heavy lid.

During the first week after the arrival of the Germans in our town, the *Kommandant* issued an order stating that all who had taken grain from the grain depository should bring the surplus to the collection point. Families would be allowed to keep a reasonable amount for family use. The collected grain had to be used for baking bread in the town's bread factory, which remained intact, and the bread had to be distributed with coupons to all working persons, as well as to the Germans stationed in town. There was a warning that those who didn't obey the order would lose all grain that they had hidden in their homes.

For those who grabbed a lot of grain during the days of anarchy this was the first disappointment with the Germans, while for the others who were not able to get much grain, it was a fair way of redistribution. For several days there was a stream of unhappy people taking the excess grain to the collection place; they received a receipt confirming the return.

Those who had seen others hauling a lot of grain from the storehouse reported the cheaters to the *Kommandantur*. Following those leads, the German soldiers came and took all that they could find in the homes, cellars, or sheds. Soon after the collection of the grain, all working adults got coupons, which they could use to buy their ration of the dark bread with the Deutschemarks they were paid for their work.

A different type of shock for the population was when the Germans entered the gate of the NKVD Headquarters leading to the courtyard and building. No one from the local people had dared to enter it during the three days of plundering, because everybody feared that before abandoning the town the NKVD agents had dynamited their headquarters. The Germans opened the big NKVD gate. In full view of the people gathered on the street, they began, with the help of local men, to pull bodies out of the manhole leading to the underground sewer drain. They were the bodies of people who had disappeared from their homes in the last few months and weeks. Among them was found the body of the hunchback professor of the Ukrainian language; he had talked too much about "Free Ukraine" independent from Russian domination.

The people came closer and stood around the open gate of the former NKVD courtyard, observing with a somber outrage this macabre operation. There were many of those who dreaded for the fate of loved ones who were arrested by the NKVD. Once in a while someone would make a mournful shriek and pronounce the name of the recognized victim, maybe their father, husband, brother, sister, or cousin. Some would quietly shed their tears, as if they had expected this to happen, and slowly walk toward the almost unrecognizable body and just stare at it as if in a trance. The others would cry loudly and fall on their knees near the swollen bodies. Those who found their loved ones were allowed by the Germans to take the remains for burial. From the sympathetic crowd bitter remarks were heard:

"Before leaving town those mad NKVD dogs killed them all. They didn't want to leave anybody alive."

"No wonder," was an answer, "don't you know the Bolshevik's motto that says, 'It's better to have one hundred innocents shot, than one 'enemy of the people' left alive!'"

During the first week after the arrival of the German troops in town, several lengthy meetings of all our relatives were held in our house. Our home was selected because it was located deep inside the courtyard and was hidden from the street by a high wooden fence, therefore the large gathering of many people would not attract anyone's attention. The first time they gathered was to discuss what they should do now that the German Army had arrived in Slavyansk.

The head of the clan was my grandfather, my mother's father, Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy, whose gray hair, long beard, and wrinkled face were the obvious signs of his venerable age and wisdom. All the younger members of the extended family treated him with great respect. His two sons Kolya<sup>5</sup> and Vanya<sup>6</sup> came with their wives, Katya<sup>7</sup> and Musya.<sup>8</sup> Also My father's brother, Igor, who came with his wife, Tonya.<sup>9</sup> Then, of course, there were my father, mother, and I. The small children, Vanya's daughter Lyalya<sup>10</sup> and Igor's adopted son, Fredik<sup>11</sup> and his daughter, Nanochka,<sup>12</sup> were playing outside in the courtyard, oblivious to the critical and perplexing decisions to be made by their parents, decisions that would influence the rest of their lives.

There was not enough space in one room for all; the men accommodated themselves around the table and on the sofa in the kitchen and the women sat on the beds in the bedroom. The men dominated the discussion, while the women listened and made occasional comments, either among themselves or by entering the kitchen and telling their opinions to the men.

The men had to make a very difficult decision about what to do now: to remain completely neutral, to ally or co-operate with the Germans, or to wait and see how things would go from now on. All women were in the favor of wait-and-see strategy and not to rush with any decision right away. They were all very worried about listening to what was the attitude of their men.

The main problem was that nobody really knew exactly what the German Nazi government was and how it differed from the other capitalist nations in Europe and in America. Soviet propaganda had always depicted all capitalist governments under one umbrella of evil and oppressive regimes without much differentiation—all were labeled as "the exploiters" and "the oppressors" of the working people. American, British, French, Polish, and other European governments were described in the Soviet newspapers as the enemies of the Soviet people and as ruthless as the Italian fascists and the German

nationalists. In fact, after the 1939 Non-aggression Pact was made between Stalin and Hitler, the propaganda against Germany and its conquests in Europe had been somewhat sweetened by the fact that Hitler allowed Stalin to grab part of Eastern Poland and the Baltic States.

Since no one believed anything that the Soviet newspapers were writing about the life in the capitalist societies, there was a natural tendency to maintain the contrarian attitude about what one would read. There was an inclination to form an idealistic opinion about the imagined life in the capitalist states, which was as far from the reality as the Soviet propaganda.

This was also the case with the men in our family. They had formed a rosy picture about the life in the capitalist societies—and Germany was included in this idealistic world—which they believed to be better, free of political oppression, and definitely completely different from the Soviet dictatorship. Therefore, when the time came to make a decision about which side to choose, the men in our family were completely unprepared to judge what the German Nazi government was really like—complete ignorance of facts.

The decision of our men was influenced mostly by their past experience: unending persecutions by the NKVD; lack of political freedom under Soviet rule; suppression of individual rights surrendered to the absolute rights of the imaginary proletarian state; political indoctrination by the Communists; oppressive rule by the Bolsheviks and the ruthless dictatorship of Stalin.

The men suddenly felt the air of freedom in expressing their hatred of all they endured for many years. They savored the sound of each word expressing their political ideas and aspirations for the future of the country. After many years of being hushed and crushed by the merciless “Red Boots,” they could finally talk aloud about all of their hatred without fear. They were ready to jump on the bandwagon with the Germans, whom they considered their liberators. They unanimously agreed, “We owe them our freedom from the Red Devil.”

They speculated that there was a hope to have a free state of Ukraine with its own government, or that maybe it could become a German protectorate. At that moment it really didn't matter to them what the Germans had planned for the future of Ukraine, they were optimistic and convinced that it could never be as bad as it was under the dictatorship of the Bolsheviks. The most important thing was that the Germans had chased the Red Devil of the Kremlin from Ukraine. During the few days after the first meeting there was much more information to be considered, depending on the orders and actions of the German *Kommandantur*.

The most enthusiastic of all men in our extended family was my grandfather. He heard that the Germans were allowing the reconstruction of churches, which had been closed and converted to clubs and movie theaters by the Bolsheviks. For him this was a sign that the Germans were sent here by God to restore the Christian faith. He was convinced that the Germans could not be as bad as the Soviet newspapers were describing them. He was pronouncing himself in their favor; for him there were no doubts that they were a worthy and honorable nation that wouldn't do any harm to the Ukrainian people, and he was urging his sons and my father to accept Germans as the liberators from the Red Devil and as the saviors of Christianity.

The next time our relatives gathered in our home to discuss the situation, Uncle

Kolya brought news that German *Kommandant* had ordered that a Town Duma be organized, a civilian town government that would take care of all urgent problems and restoring the town devastated during the Soviet's retreat and the anarchy that followed. The German *Kommandantur* couldn't get involved with all the matters that were important for the towns-people.

Our men agreed on one major point, that the life in our town needed to be guided by honest and competent people in a Town Duma."

"What would happen," they reasoned, "if dishonest and incompetent opportunists occupied that government body?"

They felt a civic responsibility and were saying, "We need to help our people restore law and order and find the just road toward the future."

They felt reassured about the Germans' good intentions for the future. Uncle Kolya reasoned, "You see how democratic the Germans are; they leave it to us, local people, to govern ourselves; they don't want to interfere with the life of the town."

"And this is during the war," Uncle Vanya supported his idea. "Could you imagine how it would be at the time of peace?"

They were voicing their commitment to the community.

"It is important that we come forward and assume civic responsibilities," said Kolya.

"Each of us should try to do it in what we are competent," he was seconded by my father.

Listening to this reasoning we, the women, were becoming anxious and commented on our doubts, "Who knows how the events will turn out in the future?"

We dreaded the unknown, "What could happen tomorrow?"

At that time nothing was settled and stable yet. Nobody knew what the Germans were planning to do with the Ukraine. But our men had already formed their opinion and were ready to make their decision.

After we women expressed our concern among ourselves, my mother and I went to tell our men that such complex matters should not be decided so quickly, without considering all the possible outcomes and consequences. Ivan's wife Musya and Kolya's wife Katya also came in the kitchen and all together we confronted the men with our questions:

"What will happen to us if things go bad for the Germans and the Red Army returns?"

"What happens if the Germans don't win the war?"

"We only know what the Communist propaganda was writing about the Germans and we think they told us lies. Maybe something is true."

"The rumors are that they kill all Jews. We don't know why they kill them. What if tomorrow they start to kill people of other nationalities?"

"What if..."

My father didn't allow us to continue and raising his voice said resolutely, "You women are like chickens, always afraid of everything. You cannot see farther than one centimeter from your nose. Chickens!" he concluded.

"Chickens! Chickens!" joined him my uncle Kolya.

His wife Katya said, "It's no use talking to them; they have made up their minds what they want to do. We cannot change that."

Uncle Vanya agreed with the decisions of the other men in our extended family, but he was more tolerant and treated us women with patience. He tried to console his sister-in-law, "You will see, Katya, the Germans will return our father's houses that the Bolsheviks seized during the Revolution. There will be enough room for all of us to live in comfort." And he added with reassurance, "The Soviets shall never return here. Don't you see how they run from the Germans with their tails between their legs?"

He really didn't convince Katya, his wife, my mother, or me with his reasoning, but we felt that it was useless to continue arguing with our men. They indeed had made up their minds.

While this meeting was going on, my uncle Igor arrived with his whole family: his wife, children, and his mother-in-law. He had very interesting news. He explained that by the order of the *Kommandant* all persons of German ancestry were requested to come to the German *Kommandantur* for registration. They went there to register their whole family and came right away here.

"My wife's father was German," Igor explained to Kolya, Vanya, and my grandfather. "You should have seen how warmly they received us! Could you imagine, the *Kommandant* shook hands even with the children. They issued to all of us *Volksdeutsche* identity cards, which mean we are considered to be German folks—that's how they call persons of German origin. They told us that we would have certain privileges in bread rationing and many other things that will be announced later."

Then he added, "The *Kommandant* interviewed us, and my wife told him that all three of her brothers were arrested shortly before the war and that nobody knew what had happened to them; they just disappeared."

Then Uncle Igor stated with an air of importance, "When the *Kommandant* was interviewing me, he became very interested in learning that I had worked for several years as a supervisor of electrical department at the Soda Factory. He called another officer and they agreed that I should start working tomorrow at that factory with the German engineer; we will be reconstructing of the turbine that was damaged by the explosion set up by the Soviets."

Igor's wife, Antonina Yulyevna, didn't conceal being proud of the results her German ancestry had produced.

The next morning Maria Sergeyevna Litvinova came to see my father. She had worked before with my father at the local newspaper, where she was in charge of a supply room at the printing house.<sup>13</sup> She was agitated and told my father, "Two Germans from the *Kommandantur* came to my home asking if I had the keys from the printing house that comrade Mukhin, the director of the newspaper, had entrusted to me. I wondered how they found out about this. They commanded that I open the printing house door and find the addresses of all former employees; then they ordered me to notify those who remained in town to come the next day to begin their work."

My father's reaction was, "That's all right, they are in charge now. You have nothing to worry about."

"That's why I am here, Orest Mikhailovich," continued Maria Sergeyevna, "to tell you to come tomorrow morning to the printing house by order of the German *Kommandant*."

"I shall be there," replied my father.

"Orest Mikhailovich, could I ask you for advice? Won't I be considered a German

collaborator if I go to all our employees to bring the orders of the Germans? You are the first one I came to because I know that you will not betray me."

"Go only to a few people," my father suggested, "and tell each of them to notify several of their co-workers and that they in turn shall also notify the others about this order. This way all will be involved in passing the order. Besides, you couldn't see all of them alone. To do this you need more than your two legs. I will go to all those who live on this side of Kharkovsky Street. All right?" He calmed her down.

The next morning my father went to the printing house and found a German officer from the *Kommandantur* and a translator there, as well as most of the former employees. The printing house remained intact with all its contents untouched; it wasn't destroyed by the fleeing Soviets because director Mukhin wanted the last edition of the paper to be distributed in the morning. It was also spared by the fury of the mob during the three days of anarchy. It was a real wonder that with so many people walking back and forth passing it, no one paid attention to this building, which stood on the corner of Kharkovsky and Railroad Streets.

With the help of a translator the German officer ordered that all printing machines be checked and started right away. He gave a few notices with the *Kommandant's* orders to be printed right away as bulletins in Ukrainian.

Then he told the employees that the *Kommandant* had given his permission to start printing a new newspaper. There were a few strict guidelines to follow:

The newspaper had to be printed in the Ukrainian language.

The materials related to the life of the town could be printed and there were no restrictions on printing anti-Soviet and anticommunist articles.

There was a prohibition to print any kind of Soviet propaganda, pro-Jewish material, and anti-German articles and innuendos.

Any information about the war, front, battles, or German Army had to be received strictly from the *Kommandantur*.

There should be enough space left in the newspaper to print bulletins and orders to the population from the *Kommandant*.

The paper had to be self-censored according to these guidelines, but in cases of transgressions the guilty persons would be punished according to the laws of war.

After giving these guidelines, the officer asked, "Now, who wants to be the editor of the new newspaper?"

Maria Sergyeyevna, who took notes on all "Do's" and "Don'ts," suggested, "Orest Mikhailovich, of course." Then she looked at the other employees and asked them, "Don't you think he could do it better than anyone of us? He had lots of experience in writing all the editorials that director Mukhin delegated to him and signed as if he wrote them."

Everybody agreed that my father was the best candidate for the position and my father accepted this responsibility right there, without thinking any more about the consequences that my mother and I had suggested only a couple of days ago. He named the newspaper "The New Ukraine" and began to fill in the pages with anti-Soviet, anti-Bolshevik articles, which in the beginning he wrote himself.

My uncle Kolya didn't lose time either; he actively involved himself in the process of organizing the Town's Duma and became a member as a Councilor of Town Residential and Commercial Properties. As an architect with many years of experience

he was just the right person to be in charge of reconstruction and utilization of the town's and the government's buildings and housing.

Kolya found an appropriate position for his brother Vanya as an accountant in his office. For Vanya it was the first place he'd been employed where he knew he would not be fired because of being former *byelogwardyets*.<sup>14</sup>

During the first week of occupation, the Germans also established a very important Office of Labor, called *Arbeitsamt*. It coordinated the requests of *Kommandantur* for recruiting workers for various auxiliary works for the Germans and for the needs of the reconstruction of various factories essential for supplying German troops and civilians with necessary products and services, as well as for the work and reconstruction of buildings by the civilian government of the Town Duma.

But, as we discovered very quickly, one of the most important functions of the *Arbeitsamt* was to draft young men and women for work in Germany. The young person who wanted to evade being drafted had only one sure way out—to find work right in our town. Many girls and boys were just hiding in their homes. But they could never be sure that the neighbors would not betray them. Some who had relatives in the surrounding villages went there hoping that it was safer, at least for now.

By the time the *Arbeitsamt* started to draft young people for work in Germany, my uncle Igor was already in charge of the reconstruction of the partially damaged old turbine at the Soda Factory located on the outskirts of the town. He offered me a job there. My knowledge of German that I had learned during five years at school and one year of technical German at Moscow Power Institute was especially valuable since head engineer Herr Hoffman was in charge of this project along with several German Military Corps engineers. In the beginning, while the reconstruction of the turbine and the boilers was going on, I worked in the office as an interpreter and as a secretary keeping track of work orders to be done by the various crews. It was good experience in German language and office work and in understanding electrical power station engineering.

The only problem was that the Soda Factory was located far from my home, across the River Torets,<sup>15</sup> and I had to walk more than one hour to be there by six o'clock in the morning and to walk back after six o'clock in the evening, and the winter was not far away. But I was safe from being drafted for work in Germany. Besides, I was receiving bread coupons and between my father's and my coupons my mother didn't have to bake as many primitive pancakes from the coarsely ground grain.

Meanwhile my father was working as an editor of the newspaper and his anti-Soviet articles had gained him the respect of the *Kommandant* and of the head of the *Arbeitsamt*, Herr Hahn. My father complained that the Germans were supporting Ukrainian nationalists and promoting their goal of separation of the Ukraine from Russia, a kind of "divide-and-conquer" policy. This conflicted with my father's ideas; he believed in an undivided Great Russia free from the communist dictatorship and in peace and cooperation with Germany and other Western States. This was transparent in his articles and was not accepted well by the Ukrainian Nationalists group, which brought this to the attention of the *Kommandant*.

It seems that at that time the Germans were using the Ukrainian nationalist movement for their own objectives; therefore, after about a month-and-a-half of working as the editor of the local newspaper, "The New Ukraine," my father was summoned to the *Kommandant* and was told that the position of the editor of local newspaper would

be better served by a Ukrainian nationalist.

He offered my father a position as a manager of the Soap Factory, where they needed a reliable person to manage the production of soap for the German troops. There was no other choice for my father and he accepted the new assignment, for which he was fully qualified as a chemistry teacher. The Soap Factory was located near the Soda Factory, where my uncle Igor was in charge of the reconstruction of the subsidiary power station and where I was working in the office.

At the Soap Factory my father had at his disposal a horse, a carriage, and a driver. Now, instead of walking, we had a mode of reliable transportation. In addition, my father was bringing home a few pieces of the slightly imperfect laundry soap each week. This was an excellent product to barter for any kind of food.

For my grandfather and for many other true believers in our town the Germans made the greatest gift they had ever desired in their lives. During the first few weeks after their arrival in our town, the German *Kommandant* authorized the restoration of the *Sobor* to its original function of the Christian Orthodox Church. This was the main church on the Soborny Square, the one that the Soviets had converted first to a club and later to a movie theater.

My grandfather had been very religious all his life and had steadfastly remained faithful through all the years of the Bolsheviks' abnegation of God. In all those years, he could never forget that those "godless Bolsheviks," or as he called them, "*byezbozhniky*" had shut down *Sobor* and were committing blasphemy in that sacred place by organizing dances, anti-religion meetings, big celebrations of revolutionary anniversaries, and displaying antireligious slogans. When the believers began to crowd the remaining smaller church, the one that stood up the hill on Kharkovsky Street at the entrance to the cemetery, the Soviet authorities took it away from the faithful as well. First, they closed it down and then they demolished it brick by brick until there were only heaps of brick rubble left defining the church foundation's shape.

Beaming with enthusiasm, my grandfather, together with several other faithful old-timers, organized a Committee for the Reconstruction of *Sobor* and began to canvass for funds for this purpose. The German *Kommandant* authorized them to take all the necessary materials for the church reconstruction from wherever one could find them—in the abandoned factories or other former governmental properties—as long as they were not being used by the German military. And they began to reconstruct the church.

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1. Olga Gladky Verro, *Quando Incominciata la Guerra* [in Italian], MS. (Turin, Italy, 1956), ed. and trans. by the author. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro Also see the chapter "Twenty-Second of June, 1941."

2. An embroidered towel.

3. "Welcome."

4. "Thank you very much."

5. Nikolay.

6. Ivan.

7. Yekatyerina.

8. Maria.

9. Antonina.

10. Yelena.

11. Alfred, Uncle Igor's adopted son.

12. Nadyezhda.
13. See the chapter "The Newspaper Proofreader."
14. The name coined by the Bolsheviks to anyone who served in the White Army during the Civil War.
15. An affluent of the River Donets, which is an affluent of the River Don.

## Destiny Of Jews Who Remained In Slavyansk

By Olga Gladky Verro  
Also as Recounted by Zoya Litvinova Flamant

A shocking event occurred in town when the Gestapo<sup>1</sup> arrived in Slavyansk and gave an order to all Jews to come to the Gestapo headquarters for registration on a specific date. Although most of the Jews had evacuated before the arrival of the Germans, many for various reasons remained in town. Some made a decision to remain, believing that they were safe because their parents or they themselves had converted to Christianity by being baptized. However, in the Soviet Union it was customary to consider Jewish as a nationality, rather than a religion, and as such it was registered on their passports, "Nationality – Jew." Some others remained because they were anticommunists, or because they didn't believe the word-of-mouth stories that Germans kill all Jews. And some of those who remained were from interfaith marriages with husbands or wives who were Russian or Ukrainian; they felt that this was sufficient to guaranty their safety.

Well, all those who went for registration at the Gestapo headquarters were given a "Star of David" insignia to attach to their clothing and they were ordered to perform unpaid work, such as sweeping the sidewalks and streets, or doing various cleaning jobs and heavy work for the Germans. Among those were the Jewish families of the two school girlfriends of Zoya Litvinova,<sup>2</sup> Lilya Margulis, and her cousin Irina Fershter.

One day Lilya and her mother were sweeping the sidewalk near Zoya's house who went out to talk to them. Lilya's mother asked Zoya if she could take their quilts for safekeeping and a well-meaning Zoya agreed. That afternoon Lilya brought a big bundle with the quilts and, of course, it didn't escape the attention of the neighbors who kept score of what was going on in the neighborhood. Zoya's stepfather, who was assigned by the Gestapo as a hostage in case something happened to the Germans in his neighborhood, was furious about her action and admonished her, "What are you trying to do? You know that it is dangerous to help the Jews hide their possessions? Do you want me to be shot? Next time when somebody asks you to do something foolish like this, tell them, 'I need to ask permission from my parents.'"

Shortly after this happened, the Jews were ordered again to present themselves at the Gestapo headquarters. By this time they all suspected that what the Gestapo had done with the Jews in the other towns would happen to them. Some went there still believing that they could explain their special case and be released, but some went in hiding, or just remained in their homes waiting to see what would happen next. The Gestapo sent agents and Ukrainian policemen to their homes to pick up those who

hadn't shown up on time.

That afternoon Zoya and her fiancée Zhenya Kozyrev were sitting in the kitchen arguing about his decision to enroll as a volunteer to work in Germany. From the time he returned in Slavyansk after deserting from the Red Army, he had stayed in Zoya's home, because he had no other place to stay; his mother and sister had evacuated with the Soviets. He had no job and felt uncomfortable being an extra mouth to feed during that difficult time. He also had a youthful yearning to travel, to see new land and how people lived in the capitalist world maligned by the Soviets. He explained this to Zoya hoping she would understand. But she became upset with his decision and told him that he really didn't love her if he was deserting her for an undefined adventure.

Their arguing was interrupted by sudden frantic knocks at the door that scared them. It was Lilya, with all her clothes covered in mud, and with anxiety and fear on her face. She told them that the Gestapo agents took her mother, aunt, and her cousin Irina from their home. But while the Germans were busy with the other women, the Ukrainian policeman had allowed Lilya to hide and even told her how to escape. "I didn't know what to do; I cannot go anywhere in this condition," she said and implored Zoya to help her.

Zoya allowed her to wash up and gave her clean clothes to put on. Then she suggested that it would be better for her to leave the town and hide in the neighboring village. And Lilya immediately left, hoping to reach the village before dark. She was lucky, because those who went to the Gestapo or were taken from their homes never returned. According to some witnesses, during the night they were transported in trucks out of town and shot.

Before the arrival of Germans in our town, people heard word-of-mouth statements, such as "The Germans kill the Jews." It had an abstract meaning then and didn't make much impression on the general population. Many didn't believe that it meant all Jews, maybe some who were Communists, or those who had done something against the Germans. But when it happened in our town, a familiar person's name was attached to it. That Jew became a real person, maybe one who was a friend, a neighbor, a coworker, teacher, somebody that one knew as a decent human being who had not harmed anybody in their entire life. Then it came as a shock and one began to question: "Why? Why do they kill this or that Jew? What had they done to deserve such execution?" And there was no answer, no explanation to this act of cruelty. People became appalled, confused, and sorry for the innocent victims of the Gestapo.

Among these victims was my teacher of Russian language and literature, Anna Nikolayevna Shmulevich. She was Russian and her husband was a Jew. I heard that she had left her small daughter with her sister and went with her husband to the Gestapo hoping to save him and, when he was detained she didn't want to leave him and go home, as some others did. She was hoping that because she was Russian, she could vouch for him and they would release him the next day. But she was taken with the others during the night and was also executed. My favored teacher of physics, Yudin, disappeared that day, but as I found out later, he didn't go to the Gestapo, but joined an underground group of partisans who helped him to escape; then he joined an active partisan detachment. I was glad that my school friend Syma Shyrman had evacuated on time.

The life of my friend Zoya was again upset by the return of Lilya Margulis in

Slavyansk, where she found asylum in the home of her friend Zhorzh Savkin. But the neighbors reported this to the Gestapo and she barely escaped from home, telling his mother that she was going to Zoya's home. Indeed, she came again to ask Zoya's help. This time Zoya told her that she had to leave her home immediately before her stepfather heard her and both of them got into trouble. She admonished Lilya for being foolish to return in town and told her that she should quickly go somewhere else in the village where nobody would know that she was a Jew.

The next day while Zoya's girlfriend Olga Chernyavskaya was visiting her, the mother of Zhorzh Savkin came. She was all agitated and asked, "Where is Lilya? We have to tell the Gestapo where she is, otherwise they will kill us all for hiding a Jew.

They searched our house last night. Probably somebody saw her coming to your house yesterday."

"I don't know where she is," answered Zoya, "I told her to get out of town and she left right away."

"If they interrogate me, I have to tell them that she went to see you," said the woman before leaving. "You better have an answer ready for them when they come to interrogate you."

When the woman left, Zoya told her friend Olga. "I am scared. I cannot tell my stepfather about this, or ask his advice. He was already furious when I allowed Lilya to leave her quilts here. What I am going to do?"

Olga came up with an idea. "Let's go and ask the advice of my father." When Zoya told him the whole story, the three of them examined several alternatives and came to the conclusion that the best thing for Zoya was to go and enroll as a volunteer for work in Germany, especially since they knew that the convoy train was departing in two days.

Zoya reflected, "My fiancé Zhenya departed only recently as a volunteer for work in Germany. When he left, I was very upset, feeling that he was abandoning me. But now, I feel that maybe it is our destiny to find each other over there. And it is a good explanation I can give my parents for volunteering for work in Germany." The next morning she went in the *Arbeitsamt*, as was called Office of Labor in German, and enrolled as a volunteer, leaving her mother and stepfather surprised at her quick decision. She didn't say good-bye to anybody except her friend Olga Chernyavskaya, who knew her reasons for doing this.

The next morning Zoya was on the train departing for Germany. Her mother, Maria Sergyeyevna, who accompanied her to the train, told my mother and me that there were many girls from Slavyansk who were departing as volunteers; among them were the sisters Zina and Shura Shumakova and Lyuba and Lida Kravzeva, Nyura Chervyakova, Lyelya Savitskaya, and Zhenya Stavitskaya. Their good-byes with their parents were very emotional, but they didn't look unhappy. Many other girls who were drafted were crying aloud because they didn't want to leave their home and their parents.

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1. Gestapo – acronym for *Geheime Staatspolizei* - the German secret state police organized under the Nazi regime to operate against political opposition.

2. As recounted by Zoya Litvinova, the daughter of Maria Sergyeyevna Litvinova.

## Tumultuous Time For the Young Girls

By Olga Gladky Verro

Although I worked twelve hours every day, from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening, including Saturdays, I had time to see my school friend Musya Davidenko.<sup>1</sup> One day she told me she had received a notice to present herself at the *Arbeitsamt* for the screening, which was done for all who were to be sent to work in Germany. The mother of Victor Ukrainsky, a boy from our school, found work for her in the German office where she was working and where they needed a typist who knew German. This work qualified Musya for exemption from being drafted.

Meanwhile Musya's boyfriend Nikolay Deryuzhkin, who had deserted from the Red Army, had arrived home. Musya complained to me that he continued courting her intensively, while her feelings for him had vanished the year before when she was studying in the Kharkovsky Medical Institute; they had seen each other only once during the winter vacation in January 1941. Besides, she was afraid that since he was a former Secretary of the Komsomol of our Ten-Years-School the Germans might suspect him as being connected with the partisans and that her association with him was not the best thing for her.

On those Sundays when I didn't have to work, I used to visit my school friend Musya. During that time we became very close friends and shared all our secrets. One day she told me that the woman who sponsored her for work as a typist in the German office had quit her work because the German officer who was in charge was making advances toward her. She suggested that Musya also find another job. So Musya found a job as a cleaning woman at the slaughterhouse. Although the job was not the best for her abilities, it had its advantages. She could bring home plenty of bones for soup for her and her aunt's family, who had two small twin boys in need of nourishment.

Musya told me that her parents and her aunt and uncle came to live in Slavyansk during the period when the Bolsheviks were dispossessing the *kulaks*.<sup>2</sup> They had been able to get away from the village before they were singled out as well-to-do peasants, who were labeled as *kulaks*. This way they saved some of their possessions and enough money to build houses in our town.

Musya complained that her former boyfriend Nikolay Deryuzhkin, who had deserted from the Red Army and had returned home, had become a nuisance and a problem for her.

"I don't know what to do now," she told me, "because he comes and insists that we get married right away. You know that he used to be the secretary of the Komsomol cell of our Ten-Years-School."<sup>3</sup> I am afraid of the reprisal by the German Gestapo. If

somebody denounces him I will be in trouble, too. Especially now that he is actively involved in the theatrical group in the Small Town's Theater and many people know about his past political activity."

"My advice," I said, "is not to hurry into marrying him. Wait and see what happens to him."

"And then," she added, almost excusing herself for losing interest in him, "after being away for one school year at the Kharkovsky Medical Institute, I realized that I don't love him. Before, I liked his assertiveness as a leader in the Komsomol. And being very young, I admired him and was flattered to have him as a boyfriend. Now, I see him as being pushy and disregarding my and my parents' privacy. He comes and stays as long as he wants in our home, and behaves as he can command us all. I am afraid to tell him about it because I think he would not understand; this is his character, as he was used to being in charge in our school Komsomol cell."

"You have to find a way to postpone the marriage," I advised her. "Time will change many things. At all costs, postpone it, and postpone it!"

On Sundays Musya used to come to our house and my mother was giving us French lessons. Mostly we learned to read and write, and some practical conversation. We thought that knowing one more language could become useful one day.

At the Soda Factory the reconstruction of the subsidiary power station was done very quickly. My uncle Igor told me that before the power station began to work he would put me in training as an operator of the electrical control panel where they would need three very reliable people to work three shifts, day and night. He asked me if I knew any girl from my school that spoke and wrote German to put in the office in my place. By this time my friend Musya was already working.

In a few days I saw Zoya's friend Olga Chernyavskaya, who told me that she was trying to find some work because she didn't want to be drafted for work in Germany. I knew Olga from school as a very nice girl and knew that she had remained in Slavyansk with her father, who was Russian. Her mother, Rosalia Isaakovna, was a Jew. She was a doctor and evacuated with the others from the military hospital where she worked. She took Olga's younger sister Galochka<sup>4</sup> with her. I asked Olga how she evaded being taken as a Jew. She explained to me that on her passport she was registered as the nationality of her father, a Russian.

I told Olga about the work I was doing and that there was an opening for my replacement. I asked her about her knowledge of German language and if she would be able to read, write, and work as an interpreter. She told me that besides having the usual five years of German in school, she also had very good training with the young German soldier who was stationed in their home. She was confident that she would be able to do the work. Because she was a very good friend of Zoya, I knew that I could recommend her for work in the office of the power station. She agreed to come the next day for an interview.

The next morning Olga came with me to the Soda Factory and she was interviewed by the power station's German officer in charge, Herr Hoffman, and by the civilian supervisor, Igor Mikhailovich Gladky. They found that her German was excellent and she was hired on the spot. Olga had a pleasing personality and was naturally inclined to work in harmony with people and get along with everybody: superiors, workers and coworkers. She was a very warm and sincere person and everybody liked

her. Both Herr Hoffman and Igor Mikhailovich Gladky were very pleased with her efficient and excellent work. As for Olga and me, this was the beginning of a true friendship.

From the time my father began working at the Soap Factory and had the driver who came every morning with the horse and carriage (and during the winter with the sled), we could indulge ourselves in sleeping a little bit longer. Many times Olga Chernyavskaya had a ride with us when it was raining or snowing. Then from the Soap Factory she and I walked to the Soda Factory, where the electrical power station we worked at was located.

Olga and I became very good friends and established a mutual trust to a degree that we could share many of our thoughts and concerns, knowing that we would keep it confidential. Olga told me that during the first months of occupation, they had a young German soldier stationed in their home. He was a very handsome young man, very bright, and educated; he had very fine manners, which was not common at that time for young men in the Soviet society.

Olga was an intelligent and attractive young girl and, most of all, she had a

Olga was an intelligent and attractive young girl and, most of all, she had a very pleasant personality. She told me that in the evenings the young man taught her German and together they read German books that he had from home. In a short time they fell in love with each other. Olga believed that he was really serious when he told her that he wanted to marry her; he treated her with respect, never made any improper advances, and their relationship never went beyond a few kisses.

When the young man left for the front, he promised Olga that he would return to see her as soon as he had a furlough. He wrote her several letters from the front always reassuring her of his love.

Shortly after he was gone, the Gestapo killed the Jews of Slavyansk. Knowing now how the Germans hated the Jews to the point of killing them for no obvious reason, Olga seriously thought about her relationship with the young German. Considering what happened to the Jews, she felt that she could expect only the worst by telling him the truth—that her mother, as well as her grandparents and many of her relatives, were Jews. She decided that there was no future for her with this attractive young German, to whom she absolutely could not reveal her Jewish ancestry.

When the young German returned to see her, she saw him from the window as he was walking on the street. She ordered her father to tell him that she had gone to stay with her relatives in a village and would not return home for a long time. Then she quickly ran out the back door to hide in their neighbors' house; she stayed with them for several days until she was sure he was gone. Since then he didn't return to see her and she didn't receive any more letters from him. She assumed that he either understood that she didn't want to see him anymore, or that he'd been killed or badly wounded on the front.

After telling me this intimate story, Olga said resolutely, "One thing I know now, no matter what would happens in the future, I will never marry a Jew!" I was impressed with her decision and challenged her statement, "What will you do, if your boyfriend David Gorelik returns home and asks you to marry him?"

She replied decisively, "If it happened today, I definitely would tell him that I would not marry him because I don't want my children to someday suffer because they are

Jews.”

“You feel very strongly about it,” I commented.

“That’s because I saw what happened to many Jewish families that were killed just for being Jews. Why should I dread that such destiny could happen to my children or my grandchildren? History repeats itself very often. Why should I risk such a chance if it could be easily avoided?”

“I think that your reasoning is hasty,” I said to her. “And I am not sure if your heart will feel that way if you see David again.”

“At this time I know that my decision is sound,” answered Olga. “Anyway, there is no hope that David will return here. Why bother to think about something that is definitely impossible?” I didn’t even tell my parents about this conversation with her.

There were several young girls from our school, Olga’s and my classmates who remained in town, but every one of them had either formed new friendships, or kept to themselves and avoided keeping contact with others. It was very strange to find out how some of the girls changed their political and personal tendencies during the German occupation.

I was especially surprised that Raya Kirichenko, who was a secretary of our class Komsomol cell, now worked in the German *Kommandantur* as an interpreter. She remained a soulmate of her school girlfriend Valya Lysykhina, who turned out to be a *Volksdeutsche* and also worked there. I always saw them on Kharkovsky Street walking together arm-in-arm, keeping their heads proudly high, as if by working in the German *Kommandantur* they were superior to the others. They barely condescended to answer to my greetings.

Then there was Raya Gunicheva, who was just a member of Komsomol without any special previous position in that organization. According to some rumors she belonged to the underground partisan group in our town. Some believed that when our physics teacher Yudin was summoned to the Gestapo as a Jew, she helped him to flee and join the partisans.

Then there was my classmate Olga Krasnaya, whom I detested for her gossip. She was also a Komsomol member, and to everybody’s surprise, she was one of the first girls from our town who volunteered for work in Germany.

It was a tumultuous time for the young girls to keep their loyalties to the Communist Party Youth organization and find new alliances under the German occupation. I felt that all their Komsomol memberships were just a farce—they renounced their loyalty to that organization too fast to be considered true members.

Observing what happened to these girls, I felt more secure and true to my conviction of never to belong to that organization. I maintained my loyalty to the anticommunist political convictions of my father, mother, and my grandfather, and, as it had become obvious, to those of my uncles on both sides of the family. I didn’t feel that I betrayed anyone by keeping true to what I had believed before.

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1. See the chapter “The New Ten-Years-School in Slavyansk.”

2. See the chapters “The Dispossessed” and “Peasants’ Plight.”

3. See the chapter “The Last Year of School.”

4. Diminutive of the name Galina.

# My Cousin Volodya And His Wife Raya

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Recounted by Vladimyr G. Berezhnoy and Raisa P. Zagoroyko Berezhnoy

Toward the end of October 1941 my cousin Volodya,<sup>1</sup> the younger son of my mother's brother Nikolay arrived in Slavyansk. He had escaped from the hospital where he had been recuperating for about three months from a head wound he received in the first days of the war. His father and mother hadn't had any news from him since the time he was drafted and it was a great joy for them to see him alive and well.<sup>2</sup>

However, they didn't know anything about their older son Nikolay, or, as we all called him, Kotyk, who had also been drafted in the first weeks of the war. Considering all the young men who had been thrown against the German tanks by the Red generals, it was not difficult to imagine what could have happened to him.

Before my cousin Volodya arrived in Slavyansk in the fall of 1941 during the German occupation, I had not known him well because our families always lived far away from each other. Therefore, I learned something about his life from what he recounted when we finally had a chance to get acquainted at that time.

Volodya told me that he met Raya<sup>3</sup> in 1938 during their first year of studies at the Kharkovsky Institute of Physical Culture of Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> After they finished the third year of studies and before the end of summer vacation, on September 21, 1940, they got married and both continued to attend the fourth and last year at the Institute. In June 1941 Volodya and Raya graduated from the Institute and received their diplomas. They were planning their future and had many dreams, which were shattered by the events that were beyond their control.

On June 22, 1941, when Germany unexpectedly started the war with the Soviet Union, the mobilization of all young men of draft age was immediately declared and Volodya was drafted into the Red Army.<sup>5</sup> He had time only to notify his parents about it and to receive a letter from his mother. She wrote that his brother Nikolay had also been drafted into the Red Army and that they were evacuating from the town of Stanislav<sup>6</sup> to their native town of Slavyansk, taking Nikolay's wife Lidia and their baby son Boris with them.

After Volodya was drafted Raya decided to return to Stalino to stay with her mother. She promised him she would stop on her way in Slavyansk and visit with his parents. Volodya was sent for training on the military base near Kharkov. But the new recruits didn't stay long to learn to be efficient soldiers and, without finishing their training, all newly drafted young men dressed in Red Army uniforms and with guns in their hands were transported quickly to the front line. Every day the front line was moving deeper and farther into Soviet territory.

A few days after Volodya arrived to the front line the Germans attacked his company and in the first battle crushed it. At about twelve o'clock of that night Volodya was wounded by shrapnel, which cracked his skull in several places and came out in the back leaving a quarter-size hole. It was a serious wound, which initially left him

paralyzed and in the morning he was transported to a civilian hospital located in the rear somewhere not far from the town of Kursk; he remained there unable to walk for about three months.

During his long stay in that hospital Volodya observed that as soon as his wounded comrades were healed, they were immediately sent back to the front. And the newly wounded soldiers who arrived daily were reporting that nothing had changed in the defense tactic of the Red Army generals. They continued to send to the slaughter wave after wave of untrained young men without any other weapons but their guns against the well-equipped German Army.

Thus, the news from the front was not encouraging and clearly indicated that being sent back to the front would not allow him much chance for survival. Therefore, when Volodya started to improve after one month of undergoing physical therapy, he tried by all means that he had learned from being a physical culture student to fake being handicapped. It was a desperate attempt to postpone that dreadful day of being sent back for slaughter at the front. For about two months he was able to pretend to be in worse condition than he actually was.

The latest news from the front line brought back by the newly wounded soldiers was overwhelmingly pessimistic, reflecting the mood of panic, disarray, and resignation among the ranks of the Red Army soldiers and lower rank officers. They were talking about soldiers who felt a futility about dying for, as it at that time appeared, "a lost cause."

It became clear from the first weeks of the war that the Soviet military machine—which for decades had been proclaimed by the boisterous Communist propaganda as being "invincible" and "ready for battle against the fascists and the capitalist aggressors"—was in fact caught unprepared and disorganized when the German Army made a surprise attack. It also became clear that the military was pressured by the ruthless Communist Party leaders and, as it was known at that time, by Stalin himself, to gain time to regroup and reorganize the resistance by any means. This included throwing wave after wave of new recruits to the front line as slaughter meat for the well prepared, organized, and equipped German Army.

The news of a mass surrender and desertions by desperate soldiers, who had been sent by the generals to shield against the advance of the invaders with their bodies, was spreading with amazing speed among the Red Army soldiers and the population at large. As a reaction to the failure of the Soviet military and the Communist Party leaders, each soldier perceived surrender and desertion as acceptable personal choices for survival.

The population was outraged by the unpreparedness of the Red Army to defend the country against the aggressor, and by the unrelenting cruelty of the Communist Party and Soviet government leaders who senselessly sacrificed millions of young men to cover up their political and military mistakes. Therefore, a large part of the population in the areas close to the front was sympathetic to the young men who were escaping from a certain death and the horrors of carnage on the front line. The men were considered to be innocent victims of the failed Soviet system and of the hated and detested Communist leadership. Very few people considered them deserters and traitors to their country.

The real traitors were in the higher ranks of the Communist Party and Red Army

military leaders, who had deceived the people with their slogans and failed to keep the country in a state of military readiness. Almost in every family there was someone dear among those young men, their sons, brothers, husbands, grandsons, cousins, or sweethearts, who was sent to the front line for certain death. This was especially felt as an underlying mood among peasants in the regions closest to the front, where the news was spread by word of mouth and could not be censored, suppressed, and controlled by the Communist regime.

Civilian hospitals were converted to military hospitals and were overflowing with wounded young soldiers, many of them from the nearby regions. Women of all ages, old men, and young boys and girls were allowed to go to the hospitals to see if they could find their loved ones among the wounded. The hospital where Volodya was recuperating also had many visitors from the nearby villages. One day a group of young women from a nearby farmstead came there. Although they didn't find anybody that they were looking for, they stayed a long time, chatting and socializing with the wounded soldiers.

Volodya talked to the girls and, after perceiving their sympathetic feelings, he dared to ask one of them if she would be interested in bartering his military uniform for civilian clothes. It was known at that time that military wool coats and uniforms were appreciated for their warmth, and peasants were eager to get them. They would usually dye them another color and then make them over into nice warm winter outfits. Therefore, it was not too suspicious to ask about such an exchange and to find somebody who was interested in it. It was also known that soldiers exchanged their uniforms for civilian clothing so they could desert from the army. This unspoken understanding was mutual. The young woman consulted with her girlfriends and then told Volodya that they were interested and would return as soon as they found clothing that would fit him.

As promised, in a few days they returned to the hospital and brought him some old clothes from a teenage boy. The clothes were worn out, tight and short, and fitted poorly, but Volodya had a slender build, and managed to fit into those clothes without being suspected by the hospital personnel. The girls were laughing at his appearance and he decided that he would try to walk out of the hospital with them, hoping that if he mixed with the crowd the guard at the gate would not suspect him. So with the group of giggling peasant girls Volodya was able to sneak out of the hospital without being detected. He went with them to their farmstead near a small town called Putivy, not far from the town of Kursk.

Much later in his life Volodya found out that for the purposes of accounting he had been reported to the military authorities as being dead. After all, they could not report that he just walked out of the hospital without being detected by the guard.

The girls took him to a cottage where two old women lived. One of them was ugly, crippled in the knees, and barely able to walk. The other, her sister, was lying on the stove-couch and dying from tuberculosis. They were glad to have a man in their house, because there were so many chores that they could not do by themselves. Volodya chopped wood, got water from the well, dug beets from the garden and put them in the cellar for the winter.

In the evenings he went to the shoemaker's house, where most of the old homesteaders gathered to socialize and to share the news brought by word of mouth. That news was considered very reliable because somebody had seen it with their own

eyes, or heard it with their own ears. Nobody could trust the news reported in the newspapers, which was full of propaganda and lies about the war, about where the front line was, and about how quickly the Germans were marching into the interior of the country. After the round of news was over, the peasants sometimes played cards.

One evening a woman asked Volodya if he was able to foretell the future with cards. Somewhat unsure of himself he said, "Yes, I think I can try. My mother taught me. I hope I still remember it." He placed the cards for this woman on the table and they showed that somebody close to her was now on the road.

She shed a few tears and said, "I can hardly hope that this is true... But thank you anyway."

Early the next morning somebody banged at the door calling, "Volodya! Volodya! Open the door!" And the woman rushed into the open door crying profusely and repeating, "My son came home... My son came home last night..."

After this incident Volodya became well known at the farmstead for his ability to foretell the future with the cards and everyone was asking him to do it.

Suddenly an order came from the Soviet authorities in the nearby village that all people who did not belong on the farmstead had to be registered. The farmstead representative told Volodya that he had to register him and forward the information to the Soviet authorities. It meant that they would draft him again into active duty in the Red Army. Volodya asked him not to report him and promised to leave the farmstead immediately the next day.

The peasants, as well as the farmstead representative, had become very fond of Volodya. The representative gave him a very good and detailed advice for the road, "The NKVD agents are everywhere on the railroad stations and in the trains. They are checking documents to catch deserters from the front and young men of draft age who move from one place to another without establishing their residency anywhere, thus evading being drafted." Therefore, he advised Volodya that, if he wanted to get home safely, he should not travel on the train, but should walk. He said that the best way was to walk on the railroad tracks, to make sure of going in the right direction. But he recommended making detours around the railroad stations; he said not to stop at night to sleep even in the smaller stations, but preferably to stay overnight in peasants' cottages on the farmsteads or in small villages located close to the tracks.

The peasants from the farmstead liked Volodya so much for his foretelling with the cards, that, when they found out that he had to leave, they collected everything they could for his journey: bread, lard, ham, hard-boiled eggs, and warm clothing. They gave him directions on how to reach the railroad tracks going through the nearby farmsteads and villages and gave him the names of peasants where he could find places to stay overnight.

When Volodya left in the morning the word of mouth traveled so fast that in the nearby farmstead and village peasants already knew that he was on his way in that direction. To his surprise, when he arrived there, his fame as a foreteller was already known. The villagers who expected him gave him welcome and a place to stay, of course under the condition that he would foretell their future. This welcome continued for about fifty kilometers from the first farmstead. The peasants were very generous with Volodya for his foretelling favors and continued to fill his backpack with all kinds of food.

He reached the railroad near a town called Putivy located not far from Kursk. From there he started to walk south along the railroad tracks. Volodya followed the advice of the farmstead representative and stopped overnight in the nearby villages and always found places to sleep in peasants' cottages. He was dressed well in warm clothing and had enough food in his backpack..

After he passed the station of Kharkov, he encountered another young man who was also on his way home after being spared by destiny on the front line. From him he learned that he was already on the territory occupied by the German Army. That day they walked together and stopped for the night in the nearest village. Having enough food for the rest of his journey home, Volodya was generous and shared his supper with his companion. After a good meal they both fell sound asleep, or at least Volodya did. Early in the morning, when he woke up, he didn't find his backpack or his new companion. The host of the cottage said that the young man probably left during the night because they heard their dog bark for a while, running after somebody to the gate. Nothing could be done; at least the warm clothing that Volodya slept on and covered himself with was left and he could be warm for the rest of his journey.

This way, walking south along the rail tracks from village to village, Volodya had almost reached the town of Slavyansk. At about ten kilometers from the town he heard the rhythmic clacking of heavy boots behind him and heard some utterance in German. From the tone of voice Volodya understood that it was a command directed toward him since there was no one else nearby. He stopped and looked back. He saw a German soldier with a big military backpack walking fast on the tracks in the direction of Slavyansk.

The German made a sign to Volodya to come closer. Well, of course, he obeyed and walked toward the German who removed his backpack and placed it on the tracks. As Volodya approached, the soldier told him something in German, which Volodya couldn't understand. But it became very clear what the soldier wanted after he propped his heavy military back pack on Volodya's back and ordered him to walk ahead toward Slavyansk. Thus for the last ten kilometers Volodya carried this heavy backpack until they reached the outskirts of the town; there the German ordered him to stop. Mumbling something, he took the backpack from Volodya and turned into one of the streets.

Volodya knew the town well and went directly to the street where his grandfather Berezhnoy lived. As he entered the gate, the old dog Arap pulled on the metal chain, with which he was attached, and started to bark at him. Alarmed by the dog's barking, Grandfather opened the door. But the old man couldn't recognize at once his grandson; Volodya's face was tempered from the weather, he looked exhausted after such a long journey, and his clothing was all worn out.

"Grandfather, I am Volodya. Don't you recognize me?" he said to the old man.

"Oh, dear God!" exclaimed his grandfather, almost losing his voice from emotion. "I cannot believe my eyes. Is it really you, Volodya?"

He invited him into the home and called his wife Anna Petrovna to give him something to drink and eat right away. Grandfather immediately informed Volodya that his parents were in Slavyansk and were staying with Aunt Varya and Uncle Misha.<sup>7</sup> Of course, hearing about this Volodya didn't stay too long with the Grandfather and hurried up to see his parents.

When he quietly entered in the entrance hall of the house, his aunt Polya was the

first to see him there. Volodya put his finger to his mouth and whispered to her not to tell anything to the others. He heard his father and mother talking to each other. Volodya looked through the keyhole into the room and saw his mother standing near his father and holding the small baby, which, as he found out later, was Boris, a son of his brother Nikolay. Volodya hesitated to enter the room and was listening to the conversation of his parents.

"You know, Kolya," he heard his mother saying, "I would give the rest of my life only to know that Volodya is alive."

At that moment Volodya could not wait any longer and he slowly opened the door and before entering the room he quietly said, "Mama, I am alive."

Recognizing her son's voice, his mother fainted and slowly slouched on the floor together with the baby. While Aunt Varya and Uncle Misha were picking up the crying baby and helping his mother get up, his father grabbed him and embraced him so hard that Volodya felt breathless.

"Let me take a breath," he whispered to his father and, when he freed himself from his embrace, added jokingly, "You know, Papa, if it was a watermelon instead of me you would have burst it by squeezing it so hard!"

Then it was his mother's turn of to embrace and kiss her son while she was crying from happiness. Of course, all present were shedding tears of joy from emotion about the reunion.

When the excitement had subsided an exchange of stories about what had happened to them in this short period of time followed. His father told him that as soon as the Germans attacked the Soviet borders the civilian population of Stanislavow was advised to evacuate to the interior of the country, far from an imminent area of battlefields in the Western Ukraine. They decided to use the opportunity to travel with the last trains going east. They again had to abandon all their possessions, since they could take only hand luggage with them.

"And here we are back again, guests of Aunt Varya and Uncle Misha as in the old times when we arrived here at the end of the civil war," he commented. Then he told his son what happened in the few months after their arrival in Slavyansk, how the Soviets had abandoned the town, retreating in a hurry and how, after three days of anarchy and looting by the population, the Germans quietly walked into the town without one single shot.

He told his son that he was a member of the Town's Duma and would take care of registering him and finding him a place to work. Volodya knew that his brother Nikolay was married and that he had been drafted in the Red Army in the first days of war. Now he again met his sister-in-law, Lidia Prato, whom he knew from the Institute in Kharkov. He still remembered that she used to say she enrolled in the institute, "Not because I like physical education, but because I could find a good-looking and healthy husband." Well, she found Nikolay. She came to Slavyansk with her in-laws and was also staying in Aunt Varya's house with her infant son Boris.

Volodya's mother told him that his wife Raya stayed with them for a couple of days, but that she then decided to move to Stalino<sup>8</sup> and stay with her mother, who had lived alone since the time when her husband was arrested and sent to the concentration camp.

After several weeks Volodya decided to find out what had happened to his wife.

Under the German occupation, the civilian population could not use the railroads. Again Volodya had to walk along the railroad tracks, which not only provided the shortest way and the right direction, but also, since it was already winter, also the only way clear of snow, which on the tracks was occasionally cleared up for the military trains.

He wore warm clothing and got some food and bread in a bag and started his journey early in the morning. Winter was at full strength and temperature on some days was close to minus forty degrees at Celsius scale. The Germans occupied Slavyansk, but the front line in some parts was only about six miles away beyond the River Donets. In some places the Red Army artillery was shooting at the railroad tracks trying to damage them. And in those places where the tracks were too close to the forest some occasional gunshots fell short of Volodya. It was not clear who was shooting, the partisans or the Germans.

Here, close to the front line, it was harder to find a place to stay overnight for fear of partisans who were very active at that time. In some villages the peasants told Volodya that they had been ordered by the Germans to report all men who did not reside there and were asking to stay for the night. But there was always a good soul who gave him refuge for the night. Finally, he reached the outskirts of Stalino and, knowing Raya's mother's address, was able to find the house. As he was climbing the stairs to the second floor balcony, Raya came out of the door. It was a complete surprise for her since all the news that she had received until then from his comrades-in-arms was that he was wounded in the head and probably had not survived.

Volodya remained with Raya and her mother for a while, but now the Germans were beginning to register the population and, since he had left all his documents in the hospital, it was dangerous for him to stay there. Volodya decided that for him and Raya it was better to return to Slavyansk.

On December 29, 1941 they left by foot to Slavyansk. Though the weather continued to be very cold, Volodya knew he could stop for the night at the places where he had stayed before. What he didn't consider was that walking such a distance was not as easy for Raya as it had been for him. After walking only one day on the railroad tracks she had blisters on her feet and when she could not stand the pain anymore, she just sat on the tracks and told him, "Volodya, I cannot walk any farther. Leave me here and go alone." Well, he certainly could not leave her there alone. So he put her piggyback and carried her for a while. Then she tried to walk for a while, and then again he carried her on his back. And again, and again...

When they reached the station at Konstantinovka, they stopped at the home of Raya's grandfather's second wife's son. They were hoping to stay with them for a few days until Raya's bleeding blisters on her feet healed a little. But they were accepted very unwillingly. The relatives didn't dare send them away because when they arrived it was almost dark and the curfew was about to start and the Germans could shoot them. But they were allowed to sleep there only that night and were told to leave the house at dawn in the morning.

They walked for three days with Volodya carrying Raya on his back once in a while to give her some relief with the blisters. Somewhere near the station at Kramatorsk, which was about ten kilometers from Slavyansk, they unexpectedly had a break. On the road parallel to the tracks was a sled pulled by horses going in the same direction as they were walking.

As the sled came closer, Volodya recognized that they were the German soldiers. and he saluted them in a friendly manner by waving his hand, to show them that they were not the partisans. To his surprise, they stopped their horses and invited Volodya and Raya to get on the sled. The soldiers were young, about the same age as Raya and Volodya and, notwithstanding the language barrier, they were able to communicate primitively with each other. They asked Raya why she was limping and hearing that they came by foot all the way from Stalino and were going to Slavyansk they were amazed at her endurance. Then they jokingly complimented Volodya on choosing such a strong and courageous wife. The German soldiers took them all the way to the center of Slavyansk and they saluted them as good friends.

When Volodya and Raya arrived at Aunt Varya's house, his mother and father could finally put their worries away, at least for this son. Kolya found his son a job right away, so he could receive bread coupons to share with his wife. Soon after Volodya and Raya arrived in Slavyansk, they associated themselves with a theatrical group that was organized in town mostly for entertaining the German soldiers and officers. Volodya performed as an acrobat and Raya performed with the dancers.

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1. Nickname for Vladimir. See the chapters "Family of Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy" and "Kotik and Volodya Are Growing Up."

2. As recounted on telephone by Vladimir Nikolayevich Berezhnoy [also spelled Wladimir Bereschnoy in Canada] 1995-2000.

3. Nickname for Raisa - Raisa Pavlovna Zagoroyko. Also, See the chapter "Volodya's Sweetheart Raya."

4. From the taped memories by Vladimir N. Berezhnoy [also spelled Wladimir Bereschnoy in Canada]. Also as recounted on telephone by Raisa P. Zagoroyko Berezhnoy.

5. See the chapter "Volodya and Raya During World War II."

6. A town in the Western Ukraine that was annexed in 1938 by the Soviet Union from Poland.

7. See the chapter "Kotyk and Volodya Are Growing Up."

8. Former Yuzovka; later renamed Donytsk.

## Family Of Volodya's Sweetheart Raya

By Olga Gladky Verro

As Recounted by Vladimir G. Berezhnoy and Raisa P. Zagoroyko Berezhnoy

I met Raya in the winter of 1941-42 when she arrived with my cousin Volodya from Stalino.<sup>1</sup> It was then that I heard for the first time about her family and how she met Volodya in 1938 during their first year of studies at the Kharkovsky Institute of Physical Culture of Ukraine. Her full name was Raisa Pavlovna Zagoroyko and her family was living in the town of Stalino, the capital of the Donetsk Region.<sup>2</sup>

Volodya and Raya liked each other at once and began to date steadily. While they were dating they got to know each other well and shared many memories about each other's childhood, youth, and about the lives of their families. Volodya found out that Raya's ancestry was somewhat unusual, but the destiny of her father was very typical of

many citizens in the Soviet Union.

During the pre-revolutionary years Russia was undergoing rapid industrialization. To supply the increasing demand for fuel by the swiftly developing industry, there was an urgent need to increase the coal mining output as rapidly as possible. This required the modernization of coalmines *at Donbass*<sup>3</sup> that at that time were supplying coal for most industries located in the European part of Russia. For this purpose the Russian government made contracts abroad with foreign capitalists, giving them concessions for the coalmines. The foreign entrepreneurs found out right away that in Russia there were not enough trained coal-mining specialists, engineers, technicians, and specialized workers needed for such unanticipated growth. Under concession-ary agreements with the Russian government they recruited many foreign mining experts from abroad to develop the coalmines of *Donbass*.

Most of the men from abroad were coming for limited periods of time, from one to five years, and the majority of them were young bachelors; those who were married usually did not bring their families with them. There was also a large influx of men from the villages who were coming to earn money working as simple miners. They lived in quickly built wooden barracks. But the families of the local populace of coal-mining hamlets quickly became small entrepreneurs by providing room and board and laundry services for the foreign specialists, thus securing for themselves and their families a new or additional source of income.

Raisa's paternal and maternal grandparents lived between 1885 and 1914 in the coalmine hamlet Sofiyevka Rudnyk, located not far from the town of Gorlovka in the Donetsk Region. Raisa's maternal grandmother, Anna Prokofyevna,<sup>4</sup> or as she was called by a diminutive name Anyuta, came from a large Ukrainian family native to the Donetsk Region. She had three sisters, Natalia, and they called her Natasha, Polyna, called Pasha, and Proskov'ya. From their mother's first marriage they had a half-sister Anna Ivanovna, and a half-brother Ivan Ivanovich, who were much older and had started to earn their living early in their life.

As a young woman Anna Prokofyevna remained living in the same coal miners hamlet Sofiyevka Rudnyk, where she was born. She was earning her living by keeping boarders in her home. Among them was one young man who arrived from Belgium. Besides room, board, and laundry services, he also needed help in learning to speak Russian, a task that Anna helped him with willingly.

Leon Matvyeyevich<sup>5</sup> Erneou was a mining engineer who specialized in the construction of supports for the coal mine tunnels. He received his technical education and mining experience in Belgium. His parents were French, but the family lived for a long time in Belgium, where Leon was born in the town of Liege.

From the first days Anna noticed Leon's pleasant personality and his refined manners, which distinguished him from the local miners living in the hamlet. In addition to these qualities, Leon was a very attractive young man. Teaching him to speak Russian put Anna in much closer contact with him than she usually had with her other boarders. Anna was also a very pretty young woman and it did not take long for Leon to fall in love with her and for her to reciprocate his feelings.

After a short courtship Anna and Leon got married and continued to live in the hamlet of Sofiyevka Rudnyk, where their two daughters were born. The first daughter they named Yevdokiya, and they nicknamed her Dusya. In 1890 their second daughter,

Alexandra, was born, and they nicknamed her Shura. Her full name was Alexandra Leontiyevna Ernou and she was Raisa's mother.

Leon had ambition to give his daughters a good education and both girls, Dusya and Shura, attended and graduated from a *Gymnasium*, but the First World War of 1914 interfered with their further education.

As many young women during the war years, Shura felt it was her duty to be where she could help those who were defending the country from the foreign invaders, to heal the wounds of young soldiers maimed in battle, or to give comfort to those who were dying for their motherland. She also had her own personal reason for this mission. Pavel Ivanovich Zagoroyko, the young man who courted her and with whom she was in love, was recruited into the army and was sent to the front. Therefore, she enrolled and completed nursing training and volunteered as a nurse for the front line military hospital.

Raisa's paternal grandfather, Ivan Yakovlyevich Zagoroyko, also lived in the hamlet of Sofiyevka Rudnyk. He owned a photo studio and a barbershop. His wife, Maria Iosifovna Rudnik Zagoroyko, also had boarders and this work added to the family's income. Ivan Yakovlyevich and Maria Iosifovna had five children: three sons, Pavel, Zhorzh, and Nikolay, and two daughters, Yelena and Anna.

Raisa's father, Pavel Ivanovich Zagoroyko, was born in 1898 in the hamlet Sofiyevka Rudnyk. He attended and graduated from a *Gymnasium* and had enrolled at the Bachmut University in the department of Foreign Languages. But he couldn't finish his studies because he was drafted into the army and was sent to the Western front to fight the Germans in the First World War. Before being drafted, he was courting Alexandra Leontiyevna Erneou, whom he called Shura.

In 1919, right after the end of the war, Pavel unexpectedly encountered his sweetheart Shura, who served as a nurse in a military hospital. It seems that destiny intended for them to find each other during the chaotic events of the civil war that engulfed Russia after the revolution. Overwhelmed by such unanticipated happiness of a reunion, they got married right away.

They settled down in the town of Bachmut, later re-named Artyemovsk by the Soviets. As a man with education Pavel Ivanovich easily found an employment as a bookkeeper in a subsidiary division of *Zagotzerno*<sup>6</sup>. Their daughter Raisa, nicknamed Raya, was born on February 1, 1922 in the town of Artyemovsk. There she attended elementary school up to sixth grade.

Later Pavel Ivanovich was transferred to the main distribution center of *Zagotzerno* for the Donetsk Region in the town of Stalino. This was the same office where Solomon Moisyeyevich Tatarsky, a husband of Tatyana Gavriylovna Berezhnaya, Volodya's aunt Tanya,<sup>7</sup> was employed. Pavel Ivanovich and his wife Alexandra Leontiyevna knew Volodya's aunt and her husband very well.

When they lived in Stalino, Raya attended a Ten-Year-School from which she graduated in 1938. After graduation she enrolled in the Agricultural University in the town of Kherson. But she never started, because that summer her father was arrested and her mother was so upset that she became very ill and Raya could not leave her alone in that condition.

In 1938, there was an unusually well publicized trial over the plundering of state property by the director of *Zagotzerno*, a Jew by the name of Livshyts; he was accused of sending ten, instead of the usual two, railroad cars full of grain to one destination,

and selling it on the black market for his own enrichment.

Pavel Ivanovich Zagoroyko, as a bookkeeper of *Zagotzerno*, kept track of all incoming and outgoing shipments of grain and he was supposed to know the usual quotas of grain shipments to all destinations. He was called as a witness to testify against his superior. Pavel discussed the upcoming trial with his wife Shura and told her what he knew about the grain shipments to the wrong destination. He felt that since he was personally not involved in the illegal traffic of grain, he should tell the truth on the witness stand. He reasoned that telling the truth was the best way to show that he was an honest man.

When Pavel Ivanovich was put on the witness stand, the prosecutor asked him if he knew about those large shipments and that they were unusual for that destination. As Pavel Ivanovich decided beforehand to tell the truth, he answered, "Yes, I knew."

"Then why didn't you report this to the authorities?" asked the prosecutor.

"Director Livshyts, who was my superior, had authorized those shipments. I do not question the orders of my superiors. I assumed that he had good reasons for sending them there. I only followed his orders," Pavel Ivanovich said.

"Are you a sheep that does everything that he is told to do?" sarcastically asked the prosecutor. "Only a sheep does not use his brain. Don't you have your own brain to recognize that something was wrong?" the prosecutor asked raising his voice.

"I was only following an order given to me by my superior," Pavel Ivanovich repeated, trying to justify himself.

He came to the trial expecting to be a witness to the wrongdoing of his superior. But the tone of questioning by the prosecutor was definitely offensive and accusatory. He became so upset and confused by the bombardment of the prosecutor's questions, for which he didn't know the answers, that he just stopped answering them.

Well the prosecution decided that his unwillingness to answer supported their suspicions that he was also involved in the crime against the State. For the system of Soviet justice a suspicion of having committed a crime was sufficient evidence for establishing a person's guilt. And in the Soviet courts justice was done quickly without much arguing by the lawyers.

Well, Pavel Ivanovich was found to be a collaborator with his superior Livshyts and he received a sentence of fifteen years of forced labor. He was sent to the concentration camp located in the Far North on the shores of the White Sea in the Murmansk Region, near the town of Chebiyev, where at that time the exploratory drillings for possible oil fields were going on.

When the trial was over, Raya's mother slowly regained her strength and Raya found that she could enroll in the Kharkovsky Institute of Physical Culture of Ukraine, which was starting their school year in the month of October. She decided to enroll there, because this way she would not lose one year of studies.

It was during her first year at the Institute that she met Volodya. They liked each other right away and started to date steadily. It was a very difficult year in Raya's life. She considered herself lucky to have Volodya standing by her side giving her moral support and encouragement to overcome her worries about what would happen to her father and about her mother's health.

After some time, not having any news from her father, the first letter came with bad and good news. He was writing that he got the scurvy and was placed in a hospital.

While he was recovering, his jailers found out that he was an educated man, while the majority of the prisoners in that concentration camp were *raskulachenny*<sup>8</sup> peasants who didn't know how to read and write. He was assigned to work in the concentration camp's office. This saved him from heavy work in the subarctic weather, where he probably would not have survived<sup>9</sup> for very long. Later, he wrote: "In my free time I not only write and read the letters for my fellow prisoners, I have also organized classes to teach them, so they could do it by themselves. All this is making me feel useful doing something good for my companions in misfortune."

Raya's mother lived alone and worked in Stalino and Raya stayed with her during the summer vacations. Raya went steady with Volodya until the beginning of their fourth year in the Institute when they got married. They completed their fourth year and graduated<sup>10</sup> in June 1941.

After the war with Germany had started in 1941, there were no more letters from her father, but Raya and her mother hoped that he continued to work in the concentration camp office and would be able to survive.

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1. See the chapter "Volodya and Raya During World War II."
  2. As recounted by Vladimir N. Berezhnoy and Raisa P. Zagoroyko Berezhnoy [also spelled Wladimir Bereschnoy in Canada] audiotape, telephone, 1995-2000.
  3. Donbas – acronym for *Donetsky Bassey*n - Donetsk Basin.
  4. Raisa didn't remember Anna's maiden name.
  5. Russian spelling of patronymic name Matthew.
  6. Zagotzerno - acronym for *Zagotovka Zerna* - State Procurement of Grain, a governmental grain distribution center.
  7. See the chapter "Tatyana Gavriylovna Berezhnaya."
  8. Well-to-do peasants from whom the land was expropriated and they were sent to concentration camps in Siberia
  9. See the chapter "What Happened to Raya's Parents."
  10. See the chapter "Volodya and Raya During World War II."

## Under German Occupation

By Olga Gladky Verro

After a couple of months of German occupation of Slavyansk,<sup>1</sup> the population entered into a routine that was partially established by the German *Kommandantur* rules. It was also influenced by the political convictions of the individuals, and essentially derived from the economic and survival needs of the families. For the men and women who were working, the standard workweek established by the Germans during wartime was Monday through Saturday, twelve hours a day. Sunday was the day off, except for those who had jobs that required continuous operation, such as at the electrical power station.<sup>2</sup>

In our extended Berezhnoy and Gladky families all men and young members of the family were working. However, the compensation for their work was not sufficient

for the family's living expenses and not all goods could be bought with the German paper money with which the workers were paid.

In the beginning, the Occupation *Deutschemarks*<sup>3</sup> were rarely accepted as the means of paying for goods at the market, and nobody wanted the Soviet rubles that were now worthless. But during the winter of 1941-42 *Deutschemarks* slowly gained moderate acceptance by the population for buying bread with the coupons given to the workers, the newspaper, and some other goods and services, like the rent to the Town's Duma for town-owned apartments and houses and for civil transactions. But the population preferred the old method of bartering goods and this method of exchange predominated throughout the occupation.

It was mostly the task of the women who remained at home to learn where they could use *Deutschemarks* and how to find the best ways to barter the items they had for foodstuff, and then to prepare meals from what they could find. Occasionally, as an addition to the bread distributed with the coupons to the workers, the Germans were also distributing horse meat from the wounded and killed Netherlands breed horses<sup>4</sup> that Germans used for pulling the heavy artillery guns on all kinds of difficult terrain on the front. When it was available, it was a good supplement to the family diet. The women also had to take care of many other family chores, because the men were coming home late, just before curfew time.

During the first year there was plenty of grain that was pilfered from the grain warehouse after the Soviets retreated from the town. Most families had a good supply of it and, if they didn't have enough, they could barter on the market with whatever they had. Those families in which nobody worked, and large families, relied on this readily available food source. Usually the grain was primitively ground at home and made into coarse flat cakes baked on the stove surface or boiled to make porridge. These tasks took a lot of time in the daily chores of the married or elderly women. Anyway, there was not much work available for them, unless they could speak and write German, or had practical skills that were in demand for the jobs serving the German military or a few civilian jobs.

My grandfather, Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy, who all his life worked as a tailor, had good training in tailoring uniforms for the Russian Imperial Army officers when he was drafted in 1904 during the war with Japan. Now he was tailoring uniforms for the German officers and was especially sought by them to sew leather overcoats and jackets.

For many years during pre-revolutionary times my grandfather was a church council member. Now he again became a member of the new church council and was actively involved in Sobor reconstruction work, which began with the blessings of the German *Kommandant*. As soon as the *Kommandantur's* permission was obtained, the members of the church council dedicated themselves with great enthusiasm and religious devotion to this ambitious work.

The exterior of the building had no need for much renovation, except for the painting of the walls and the installation of the cupolas and the church bells. But the interior of the church, which many years ago was transformed by the Soviets into a club and later a movie theater, had to be completely redone to return to its original layout, designed for the functions and rituals of the Christian Russian Orthodox Church.

There were plenty of volunteers of all trades and specialties: carpenters,

cabinetmakers, woodcarvers, metal workers, painters, artists, bricklayers, glassworkers, seamstresses, sweepers, and helpers. One very important volunteer was the eldest son of Gavriyl Daniylovich, Nikolay Gavriylovich. As an architect he made all the reconstruction plans and coordinated them with the artists, who made detailed sketches for the interior details and decorations; he also supervised the structural reconstruction work. As the councilor in the Town Duma in charge of residential and commercial properties, he had access to many sites where building materials were available. With the permission of the *Kommandant*, he supplied the working crew with all the necessary materials.

Both the father and the son Berezhnoy were proud of each other for their contributions to the Sobor reconstruction. The old-timers were saying that, since Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy had put his heart and soul into the project of Sobor reconstruction, one could not recognize him anymore. He began to look younger than his seventy-two years of age. He was always on the go searching for somebody or something that was needed and he would not stop until it was found.

When the reconstruction work was underway, like magic, the faithful Christians began to bring small and large icons and various church implements. They dug them out of their attics and cellars, or from the underground storage places where they had been hidden for many years. The priest, or as they call in Russian, *Batyushka*, and deacon also came out of hiding, with all their chasuble vestments, censers, and other implements used in a proper Russian Orthodox Church service. Shortly before Christmas day, the Sobor was ready for the first service.

A large number of town's people and peasants from the surrounding villages came to the first service at the Sobor. It was a cold winter day, and many had to stay on the steps and outside the church because there was no more standing room inside. The German *Kommandant* and several of *Kommandantur* staff officers also came to this extraordinary event.

The inauguration of the Sobor was a solemn celebration combined with the Christmas mass. My grandfather was beside himself with joy, triumphant that he was able to get his revenge over the Red antichrist, as he was calling the godless Bolsheviks. He felt he had done everything he could to reopen God's temple.

"But," he was reminding, "we should not forget that we owe our thanks to God for allowing the Germans to come to our town. Remember that they allowed us to restore this temple of worship sacrilegied for many years by the Bolsheviks. Without the Germans, this wouldn't have been possible." For him the Germans were the supreme champions of the Christian faith sent by the providence to resurrect the Russian Orthodox Church and to proclaim the glory of God.

By the beginning of the winter 1941-42, the Germans had firmly established themselves in Slavyansk with the concentration of military supplies and weapons and a stockpile of all kinds of artillery shells and other ammunitions. And they had saturated the town with soldiers. One or two soldiers were stationed in the houses located near those places where there was a need to protect the storage of the military supplies and weapons, or the headquarters of *Kommandantur*, the *Arbeitsamt*, the living quarters of the officers, and the locations of the various military units.

In our house one not so young corporal was stationed; Karl belonged to the military unit that was guarding and maintaining the storage of artillery shells in the

elementary school yard next to our house. He slept on the sofa placed close to the baking oven in our kitchen. My mother allocated for him half of one shelf in the small cupboard, where he stored some of his food. But he had his meals in the military canteen of his unit located in the school building. He didn't share his food with us and he jealously guarded and checked the small amounts of salami or cheese daily to be sure that we didn't steal from him. We didn't have much to share with him, except tea in the evening, and he used his own sugar. He stayed with us for more than a year, and I exchanged several letters with his daughter, who was approximately my age.

Our coexistence with Karl in our small house was peaceful and without any complaints on either side, however, a real friendship never developed between him and us. By physical appearance, mentality, and educational level, he was a typical German *Bauer*, which means a farmer. He had large facial features, a heavy body built with more than average belly, and he moved somewhat like a bear. He was rough, but not disrespectful in his manners, but he obviously behaved with the acquired notion of racial German superiority over us, the conquered inferior race of Slavs.

During the winter of 1941-1942 the front line in some sections was moving slowly eastward. But the front line east of the town of Slavyansk remained almost stationary, just beyond the curve of the River Donets; the Soviet troops were on the east side of the river, which was between six to twelve kilometers from the outskirts of the town. The Soviet artillery unit entrenched there for the winter, pointed the artillery guns toward the town of Slavyansk, and kept the Germans and the population of our town under unnerving irregular artillery fire of the shrapnel shells.

The Soviets didn't fire the artillery shells regularly every day or night, and would shoot from three to a dozen shells at random in different directions, with breaks in between varying from several hours to several days. Thus, the shells would explode in different parts of the town. It appeared that they didn't have any specific place that they were aiming at, and that their objective probably was to disrupt the activities of the German military. But, in effect, they were only terrorizing the population and disrupting the life of the townspeople. The shrapnel shells didn't damage the houses much, unless it was a direct hit, which was very rare; however, they did kill, injure, and maim people. It was an irony, most of the victims were innocent civilians and very few German military men; the population was paying the high price of being on the wrong side of the front line. This did almost no damage to the morale or safety of the German Command or their troops, and it didn't do any damage to the storage of the ammunition or military weapons.

One day we heard from my grandfather that an artillery shell had a direct hit on Kalinin Street across the road from the house of his wife's brother, Dmitry Petrovich Boyko, from whom we rented the apartment before buying our small house. It happened that the shrapnel had a direct hit on the house at suppertime when the whole family was at the dinner table. It severely injured everyone and fatally wounded a young girl of about my age, whom I personally knew. They say that the poor girl was crying: "I don't want to die... I don't want to die..." It impressed me strongly and suddenly I felt very vulnerable and powerless to prevent such incidents from happening to me.

Karl, the German corporal who stayed in our house, was very helpful in providing us with suggestions on our safety and how to behave during shelling. We learned quickly to recognize that a shell was fired when we could hear a muffled "bo-o-m" sound.

It was followed by a long whistling sound of the flying shell, quickly increasing in intensity. Then followed a loud explosion with a crackling sound “ch-ch-iack-k” and the immediate whistling of shrapnels flying in all directions. Therefore, when we would hear the first shell being fired from the Soviet cannons, we had enough time to run in our cellar and wait there until the shelling stopped. Only then would we return to the house. On the job at the power station all workers would run to the ground floor in the center of the building and wait until the shelling ended.

One afternoon when my father and I were at work and my mother was alone in the house, she heard the “bo-o-om” sound of the firing cannon and immediately ran to hide in the cellar. This time, as soon as she ran through the cellar door—not even down the steps—the explosion almost deafened her. Two shells exploded in our neighbor’s courtyard about two dozen meters from the side of our house. The shrapnel damaged the whole wall of our house on the side of our porch and the entrance door from which my mother had exited only a few seconds before.

When she came outside, she realized how her quick reaction, in a matter of seconds had prevented her from being in harm’s way. But she was shaken emotionally for a long time after this happened. We didn’t know if at that time the Soviet artillery aimed at the school yard next to our house, where the Germans stored artillery shells, but, if it had been a direct hit there, our whole street block would have been blown in the air.

After this happened the shelling during the night hours increased and we were exhausted from interruptions in our sleep. It was hard for us to hear when the first shell was fired unless one of us didn’t sleep and could awake us all too quickly get up and run outside the house to reach the cellar door before the shell exploded. Therefore, with the suggestion and help from the corporal Karl, we permanently transferred ourselves to sleep at night in the cellar; he and his comrade in arms, who was stationed in our neighbor’s house, joined us.

Our cellar was good protection from the artillery shells. It was deep in the ground, had brick walls and an arched ceiling. The two Germans brought boards from the military storage yard along with empty metal casings from the artillery shells. With their help we made several wooden platforms next to the walls and supported them with the casings. We padded them with quilts and old mattresses and kept our pillows and blankets there.

Shortly after we started staying overnight in the cellar, several people came to ask us to allow them to share our shelter with us. All together, there were eleven people staying in our cellar at night. There were the four members of our neighbor’s family: Maria Nikolayevna Ivanova, the woman from whom we had purchased our house; her daughter Fanya, and her husband who was the uncle of my school friend Yasha Yakovlev who was killed in the first weeks of the war; and their young son. Then there were the husband and wife who rented rooms from our neighbors; of course there was our family, my parents and I; and Karl and his comrade in arms, the two German corporals stationed in our and our neighbor’s homes.

Somebody brought in a small metal wood stove, which was placed in the middle of the cellar to keep us warm, and we kept a teakettle with hot water on it to make tea. Although there were many people in that small cellar, there was very little conversation and socializing going on. It was mostly because we were all tired and had to get up early

to be at work by six o'clock in the morning; and we were quickly falling asleep in the security of the shelter walls. We were lucky that the Soviets constantly changed the direction of their shelling and there were no other explosions close to our home.

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1. German occupation of Ukraine (1941-1943). See the chapter "Germans - Invaders or Liberators?"
2. Olga Gladky Verro, "*I Ricordi di Guerra*" [in Italian], MS, (Turin, Italy, 1956), excerpts, ed. and trans. by the author. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
3. German marks - the paper money issued during World War II by the German government for circulation in the occupied territories.
4. Very large and strong breed of horses capable of pulling heavy loads on all kinds of terrain.

## Soda Factory Power Station

By Olga Gladky Verro

At the Soda Factory the reconstruction of the subsidiary power station was done very quickly—it was completed and was functioning after about one month of intensive work.. The repairs to the boilers blown up by the Soviets were completed; an inspection of the turbine by master electricians revealed that it was not damaged in the main part of it and needed only minor adjustments. The connection to the local 120-volt power lines was already completed. The electricians were finishing wiring the control panel of 2,000 volts, which connected it to a network of many small power stations similar to the one at the Soda Factory. This network of small electrical stations was planned to generate enough power for the essential needs of the German military occupying the region. If one or two stations were sabotaged by the partisans, or damaged by artillery shelling and stopped for repairs, the electric power would be flowing without long interruptions from the other power stations in the network.

In the beginning it was providing power only to the German military headquarters, the *Kommendantur*, the *Arbeitsamt*, the military installations, the living quarters of the officers, and to the few factories, such as the Soap Factory, the Town's Bakery, and the Town's Duma offices.

After the repair of electrical power lines was completed, the power station was connected to the regional power network of the other small power stations similar to the one at the Soda Factory. The power network supplied electric power for all essential needs of the German military in the region. If one of the power stations lost the power for some reason, it would draw power from the network without lengthy interruption of electricity. At that time the electric lines were also connected to the homes where the German soldiers were stationed. Therefore, we had electric light in our house.

It was important that the control panel operators at the electric power station be very reliable people, could speak enough German to understand the commands of the German officers in charge, and, if needed, to explain technical problems. Therefore, right from the beginning, my uncle Igor assigned a young man of my age, Sasha Velichko,

and me to the day shift to learn the operation of the control panel from Sasha's father, who had worked there before at the Soda Factory and was an expert control panel operator. Sasha and I spoke German well enough and we were both learning the technical terminology in German and teaching each other. The Father Velichko, as we called him to distinguish from his son, was teaching us the technical operations on the control panel, and Sasha and I were teaching him all the necessary technical vocabulary, command instructions, and all necessary answers in German.

There was a telephone booth with wires connecting the control panel operators with the living quarters of Herr Hoffman, the German supervisor of the electric power station; with the home of Igor Mikhailovich Gladky, the power station manager; and with the regional power network of other small power stations that were connected to it. The control panel operator had to communicate with all of them during the daily operation of the power station. This was the job that the three of us had to know how to do under all circumstances, routinely and in cases of emergency.

During the day, when the demand for power was low, we were disconnecting our 2,000-volts power lines from the power network while the 220-volts power lines were used for local needs. However, if there was a problem somewhere in the other towns connected to the power network, they would call us and we would switch our power output to the network lines. The most difficult task was to learn how to synchronize the phases of the electrical currents and to push the connecting switch in a split second when our and the network current phases matched. But with a little bit of practice Sasha and I mastered the task.

When Father Velichko finally told my uncle Igor that Sasha and I were ready to work without him, the two of us were assigned to work together on the day shift, while his father worked the night shift. So Sasha and I worked together for several months in harmony; we had a good time in knowing what we could expect from each other and being sure that we could rely on each other in our job.

Sasha Velichko was not drafted into the Red Army because he had one foot or leg that was either injured, or he had congenital handicap, and he limped as he walked. But he was tall, handsome, with blond hair and blue eyes, and most of all, he was well mannered, intelligent, and easy to get along with. I liked him from the first day, but was afraid to show him my feelings right away, waiting to find out how he felt about me.

I knew that he appreciated my theoretical background in electricity and I felt that he respected me for being smart and for learning as quickly as he did about the practical operations of the work we had to do. He was always kind to me and showed good comradeship as a coworker, but he did not seek my attention, or show me any sign of being interested in my affection.

Indeed, I soon found that Sasha had a girlfriend who lived close to his home, but I was not giving up and began to flirt with him. Sasha was not displeased with my attention and occasionally made some subtle comments about my not so subtle coquetry, but always with humor, tact, and respect for my feelings. However, he never gave me any hope that he could reciprocate my feelings. But I was happy to work with him side-by-side and appreciated his kindness and respect.

Finally, Sasha and I graduated to working independently and the three of us began to work by ourselves in three shifts. Father Velichko preferred to work the night shift because they lived on the outskirts of town beyond the River Toretz, and he owned

a house and on the adjacent piece of land cultivated all kinds of grains and vegetables for his family. I worked during the morning shift, coming in with my father, and Sasha worked the afternoon shift.

In the turbine room, which was below the balcony where the control panel was located, there was a technical supervisor who in the beginning of our training never came to see us and didn't bother us at all. In fact we didn't even perceive that he was supposed to supervise us on the control panel. One day toward the end of the morning shift he came up to the balcony where I was leisurely watching the control panel. He began to check the 2,000 volts power line copper strips located high on the opposite wall of the panel. He lectured me that the lines were very dusty and that our job was to dust them once in a while. We were supposed to do that when they were switched off from the power network lines during the day and we had only the 220-volt lines switched on. Well, since I felt that he was right, that afternoon I found a long metal handle, attached a dust cloth to it, and then climbed on the stool and began to dust these high voltage lines.

The big oil switch that connected these lines and the transformer was downstairs in another part of the building. Usually, Sasha switched it on during the second shift. I was trying to finish dusting the last portion of the wires on the opposite side of the stairs before he came in. There was a lot of noise from the turbine and I didn't hear that Sasha had come in a little bit earlier than usual. As I moved the stool further toward the end of the lines, climbed on it, and was trying to reach the wire with the metal handle, Sasha suddenly grabbed me with both arms and pulled me down. The stool and both of us fell on the floor.

"Are you all right?" he asked me anxiously.

"I think so," I said.

He helped me up and I saw his face was white as chalk and he was shaking his head. "You scared me... Oh, how you scared me..." he said anxiously.

"What happened?" I asked him in return. "Why did I scare you? And why have you pulled me down? I was just dusting the high voltage wires. The power line is off, isn't it?"

"But I just switched it on before coming up," he said hiding his eyes with his hands, like he didn't want to see what could have happened, if he hadn't stopped me. "Do you understand that if I had come up only a few seconds later, I would have found you electrocuted?"

"Why did you switch them on so early?" I asked.

"I always do that when I come so I don't have to go down the stairs again. But now I know that this was wrong. I should not touch anything before I check with you and begin my shift."

He was breathing heavily and I understood that he was really shocked by this incident. But I was completely calm because I had never even perceived the danger that I was in.

I reassured him that I hadn't broken any bones when I fell down and was alive and well. Then I said to him somewhat ceremoniously, "Thank you Sasha. Your quick action saved my life!"

"Don't be funny," he said seriously, "there is nothing to joke about and definitely nothing to thank me for." Then he perked up and asked, "But why did you decide to clean those wires?"

I told him that we suddenly had another supervisor, the man who takes care of the turbine. That he came upstairs and inspected the wires, found them to be very dusty, and admonished me that we didn't keep them clean.

"That dwarf!" exclaimed Sasha. "He thinks that by bossing us here on the balcony he will grow not only in importance, but also will become taller. You better ask Igor Mikhailovich if he assigned him to supervise the control panel."

The telephone rang; as Sasha was walking to the booth said "good-bye" to me. Since that day, he changed to an almost brotherly protective attitude toward me.

## The Year of 1942 In Slavyansk

By Olga Gladky Verro

In the spring of 1942 the German *Kommandantur* authorized all factories to allocate to their workers plots of land adjacent to the factory and authorized the Town's Duma to allocate land on the outskirts of town to any resident who wanted to cultivate it. We received a very big lot near the Soap Factory and my father hired his driver to plough it. There my father, mother, and I planted potatoes, beets, corn, sunflowers, beans, and peas. Both my father and I worked hard and took care of the growing plants by weeding out grass and tilling and aerating the soil.<sup>1</sup>

We also planted a vegetable garden in our courtyard and another one at the end of our fruit garden, where the land was clear of trees and there was a large waterhole that collected the rainwater. There we planted salad, tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, cabbage, carrots, onions, green pepper, and eggplants. It was my duty to scoop the water from the waterhole with a pail and haul it to water the plants. We also saved some of the trees destroyed by the children from the orphanage during the fight for our garden with the Soviet authorities,<sup>2</sup> and we had a small crop of apples, pears, plums, and Japanese apples, with which my mother made marmalade.

We succeeded in having a good crop to provide us with vegetables, sunflower oil, and corn to make porridge, but most of all to feed our poultry for the whole winter. We stored the vegetables in our cellar, the cornhusks in the attic, and took the sunflower seeds to the mill to squeeze the oil; we stored many bags of seeds along the walls in the house ready to roast and eat in the winter.

My mother bought chicken's, geese's, and duck's eggs on the market and put them under the sitting hen; those hatched a whole brood of chicks, goslings, and ducklings and the hen took good care of them the whole summer until they grew up. Thus with hard work we ensured having food for the whole winter.

Toward the end of the summer of 1942 the corporal Karl who was stationed in our house went home for a furlough for two weeks and asked my father to bring him some laundry soap to take home. My father couldn't refuse him because Karl used the soap that my father was bringing home for our use and he knew that my mother was bartering soap for food.

During the time when Karl was away in Germany many German troops—soldiers

and high-ranking officers arrived in our town. One Sunday afternoon several low ranking officers came to our home and politely but firmly informed us that they needed the house for the whole afternoon and that we had to leave the house and stay outside in our courtyard. We were absolutely not to come in the house.

The weather was warm and we went into our wooden summer kitchen, where my mother was cooking supper on the stove. We have set the table, sat on the benches and, as we were waiting for suppertime, watched what the Germans were doing. They inspected our house and the courtyard thoroughly and left. In the next half-hour about ten to twelve very high-ranking officers arrived—one or two at the time—with their attendants who were carrying some packages. After a while the attendants left. Finally a very decorated general came with his attendant who was carrying a large briefcase.

My father guessed, "They probably are having a secret general staff meeting. They didn't hold it in one of the military offices to keep it from being noticed, and selected our house because it is hidden in the courtyard far from the street."

The meeting lasted for several hours and when it was over the high-ranking officers left in the same way they came, one or two at the time. Then one of them told us that we could go back in the house.

With surprise, my father said to my mother and me, "The general didn't leave yet. Should we enter the house?"

"If the officer told us that we could go in, then we can go in," I said.

Indeed, when we entered the house, the general was sitting at the kitchen table, on which there were several empty bottles of wine. He got up and in a gentlemanly manner greeted us. We introduced ourselves and I am sure that he also introduced himself, but regrettably I don't remember his name that at that time didn't mean much to us, except that he was a general. Then he apologized for the inconvenience that they had caused us and invited us to sit down. He initiated a conversation with us by asking some questions about our family, what kind of work my father and mother did. And when my mother and I answered him in good German, he was very surprised at our fluency and complimented us for speaking so well. My mother said that she had the teakettle on the stove in the summer kitchen and asked the general if he would like to have some tea. He promptly accepted her invitation and my mother placed a jar on the table with cherry preserves she had made from our cherries that summer.

The high-ranking general talked to us in a very informal manner, as if we were his equals, and we felt relaxed and not intimidated by him. At some point he said, "I would like to find out the answers to some questions. Please, don't be afraid and tell me the truth, even if it isn't favorable for the Germans. What do the Ukrainian people think about the German occupation?"

With some help from my mother and me, my father told him, "As far as I know, the Ukrainian people are considering the Germans to be their liberators from the Bolshevik dictatorship. They hope that after the end of war the Ukrainian people will be free from the Soviet regime and from the clutches of the NKVD."

Then the general said, "Tell me truthfully your own opinion about the conduct of this war by the Germans."

My father replied, "I am surprised that the Germans didn't organize the Ukrainian battalions to fight side-by-side with them against the Soviets. With the discontent and the hatred that the people had against the Communists there would have been plenty of

volunteers. All the Germans needed to do was to give them the weapons and the ammunition."

The general was surprised to hear this suggestion and said, "Compared to the other European countries the Ukrainian population had a different history and has a unique friendly attitude toward the Germans. We should have considered this in our strategy."

The general was curious about the reasons for this hatred of the Bolsheviks by the Ukrainian people. My father went into a lengthy explanation about the policies of the Central Soviet Government under the direction of the Communist-Bolshevik Party. He began by telling the promised slogan during the revolution, "Land to the peasants," which had never been realized, followed by the dispossession of the wealthy peasants, so called "*kulaks*," and then by collectivization in the villages.

I tried to stop my father from his unending exposition on the faults and mistakes made by the Bolsheviks, but the general said, "Let your father recount it. I am very interested in what he is telling me."

And so the conversation with the general lasted very long. When his attendant returned and told him that he had the place to stay overnight ready, the general thanked us for a pleasant evening and said that he had appreciated my mother's tea and that he was grateful to my father for his eye-opening discourse.

The next morning the newly arrived large number of German troops left the town before dawn. Only later we understood that they went toward Stalingrad and we speculated that the high-ranking general who stayed that afternoon in our home might have been General Paulus himself.

During the spring, summer, and fall of 1942 the Soviet artillery continued random firing of the shrapnel shells on our town. The population was becoming so used to this that it was a part of the daily routine to run into the cellars and to take cover as the shooting was going on and then, when it stopped, to continue whatever one was doing before it started. Direct hits were rare and on the streets one couldn't see houses in ruins.

But one late afternoon in the fall at the time when the workers were exiting from the day shifts the Soviet artillery launched intensive shelling of the electrical power station located in the former Soda Factory. Their aim this time was very exact, covering the whole courtyard of the factory. My uncle Igor told us later that the shrapnels were flying everywhere, wounding the workers who were in the courtyard and making holes in the cisterns full of salt water, which gushed like from the giant watering cans. Very few people who were already outside were able to go back and hide inside the main building. There were many workers wounded and some were killed; among them was the son or son-in-law of the pharmacist from the only pharmacy in town. The building where the electric power station was located was not damaged, but most of the wires outside were snapped and lying on the ground.

The Soap Factory, which was nearby, was not touched. But when my father came home he told us that it had given them a big scare; there had never been such a concentration of Soviet shelling in one place. When this happened I was already home; that day I worked in the morning shift as usual and Sasha had worked in the afternoon shift. I dreaded finding out what had happened to him.

That night there was no electric power in town. The next morning when I came to

work, I found Father Velichko at the control panel and right away I asked him about Sasha. "He hid himself in the telephone booth," he answered. "But there is no damage anywhere on the control panel, or on the turbine, or in the boiler room. They killed or seriously wounded a half-dozen people who were already outside the building." He told me their names and we felt sorry for all of them, especially for those who were killed.

It took only one day to repair the low voltage wires and another to get connected to the regional power network. Although the shelling of the electric power station could have been considered successful from the Soviet point of view, they didn't repeat the shelling of that target again.

The winter of 1942-43 was very severe with the temperature hovering for a long time at about minus 40 degrees on the Celsius scale. When it went to minus 41 degrees, the Germans permitted most of the workers to stay home; however, the shift workers at the electric power station were required to work. The Soap Factory was closed and my father remained at home, but I had to go to work.

I put my *valenky*, a kind of felt boots, with several socks on my feet, wore several sweaters, a winter coat with quilted lining and a fur collar, and wrapped a woolen scarf on my head covering my whole face except my eyes. Then on top of it all, my mother wrapped me in a big woolen afghan. I barely could walk with all that weight and had to remove my eyeglasses because my breath was covering them with fog and I couldn't see where I was going.

There was nobody outside and I was walking alone. When I walked across the bridge where there were no more houses and in front of me only a white field, I felt like I was the only person in the world lost in a white desert. It was so hard to walk wrapped in all that clothing and I was a little bit late. Father Velichko was surprised to see me and said, "How did your parents allow you to go out in this weather? I was already planning to make all three shifts because I told Sasha to stay home and thought that you would not come either."

I replied, "I had to come, so you can go home."

"Well," said Father Velichko, "I will come this afternoon instead of Sasha and will stay until tomorrow morning. If the weather will be as bad as today, I will be glad to take over your shift tomorrow."

I thanked him for his offer, but said that I probably would come because my father would have the driver to bring him to the soap factory.

It was an exceptionally cold winter in Ukraine; even my grandfather didn't remember one like this in his seventy-plus years. All warfare was at standstill, even the shelling stopped.

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1. Olga Gladky Verro, *I Ricordi di Guerra* [in Italian], MS, (Turin, Italy, 1956), excerpts, ed. and trans. by the author. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "The Fight for Our Garden."

## The Big Thaw

By Olga Gladky Verro

Until the winter of 1942-43, the general opinion of the Ukrainian population that had been under the German occupation was that the Soviets would not be able to retake the land, which they had given up to the Germans almost without fighting. The front line near our town of Slavyansk was at a standstill. The weather was so cold that no one expected either side to move from their positions.

Then suddenly, sometime after the New Year, probably at the beginning of February, the Soviets suddenly launched an unexpected attack across the River Donets. It became clear that a breakthrough was imminent.

Herr Hoffman told Igor Mikhailovich to stop the electric power station and ordered not to damage anything, leaving it intact, and, after the boilers and the turbine were shut down, to send all the workers home. He said that this was probably a temporary setback and that they hoped to return very soon. I was at work on the morning shift and my uncle Igor came to the control panel, checked the switches that I had already turned off, and told me to go to the soap factory to alert my father and tell him to leave town immediately. My father also sent his workers home and locked the factory. Then my father and I walked briskly and arrived home before noon.

My mother was not surprised when my father announced, "It's time to go! Give me a change of underwear, socks, and a shirt. Also give me a piece of soap and some food for the journey. Igor told me to get out of town as soon as I can because the Soviets are crossing the River Donets. Lyalya will tell you everything that we know about the situation."

Meanwhile Corporal Karl came in the house, collected his belongings in a hurry. He said that as a precaution in case the Soviets were able to reach the town, the German troops had begun to withdraw to a safer position and that he was leaving with his unit and the trucks full of ammunition.

My father decided not to wait any longer; he dressed himself in warm clothing, took the backpack and left in a hurry to get as far from town as possible before dark. Soon after my father left, my grandfather came and told us that Kolya and his brother Ivan had also left in a hurry and Volodya and Raya had left with the theatrical group that entertained the Germans. Many people who felt vulnerable to Soviet reprisals also left at that time. Everything happened so suddenly that mostly the men left town; there was no time to take their families with them, and besides, it was very, very cold.

My mother and I couldn't sleep that night and kept the kerosene lamp burning late into the night. Close to midnight we heard two tanks firing with their light cannons somewhere on the outskirts of town. Then dead silence enveloped the town. Exhausted, we fell asleep.

In the morning, as if by magic, the weather suddenly changed and the thaw set in. There was a lot of snow accumulation everywhere and by midday the snow began to melt and the streets were filled with a mushy mix of snow and water. The weather didn't cooperate with the Soviet offensive and it was not until only late afternoon that the Red Army soldiers appeared on the streets of Slavyansk. They walked slowly, dragging their heavy felt boots (*valenky*), which had absorbed the icy water from the melting snow. Their boots were so heavy that the poor young soldiers couldn't lift them and had to push them forward with enormous effort, sliding them through the icy slush. These felt

boots were perfect for the very cold winter of that year, but they became a disaster when a thaw set in.

After one-and-a-half years of war the Soviet military leaders didn't change their military tactic from the one they had used at the beginning of the war. During this break through the front line at Donets River they drove an enormous number of Red Army soldiers against the German's well-equipped army. Many soldiers entered our town and had to be sheltered in groups five to ten in almost every house. Late in the afternoon six young soldiers entered our courtyard, and when my mother opened the porch door, one of them greeted her, "Good day, Auntie! We shall stay in your house overnight."

My mother answered promptly, "Please, welcome, young soldiers."

As they were entering each of them saluted my mother, "Good day, Auntie!"

I was standing in the kitchen and saluted them too, "Good day, boys!"

And they answered, "Good day, young girl!" I was surprised that they didn't call me, or my mother "comrade," as was commonly used in the Soviet Union.

The first thing the young soldiers did was removing their soaked felt boots and unwind the footcloths from their feet. One of them, the eldest, asked us, "Could we dry our *valenky* near the stove?"

I filled the stove with coal and opened the stove damper to make the fire stronger. Then I opened the oven and they put their boots inside, making it sizzle from the water dripping on the hot metal. I placed two chairs close to the stove and they hung their footcloths on them. The soldiers dropped their over-coats and backpacks on the floor and accommodated themselves around the stove, some sitting and some lying down.

They looked very tired and I thought, "Poor boys, they are younger than I am and probably will not survive to be my age."

Meanwhile my mother put the teakettle on the stove and prepared tea for the young soldiers, who were glad to have something hot to drink. She even sweetened it with the sugar only recently bartered for with soap. They had some soldiers' rations and my mother cooked them a big pot of corn porridge.

She kept talking with the young soldiers, trying to keep the conversation simple and personal. "Where are you from?" And after hearing the name of the town, village and region, she would comment, "You are far from home." Then she would ask, "How old are you?" And since all of them were young boys, she would comment, "You are so young to be in uniform!" Then she would ask, "How long have you been in the Red Army?" And the answer was that they were drafted only a few months ago.

By the time the young soldiers finished eating it was already becoming dark outside and I had lighted the kerosene lamp. My mother said to the soldiers, "You must be very tired. You'd better rest." For most of them her suggestion was too late, because they were already sound asleep, sprawled on the floor near the hot stove. Looking at them with sympathy, I said to my mother, "Look how young they are. Some are probably younger than me."

"Yes, very young," she replied and added with a sigh, "And somewhere their mothers are thinking about where their sons are."

"How many of them will still be alive when the war ends?" I said with regret in my voice.

"Sh-sh-sh..." My mother stopped me from telling my thoughts further.

My mother helped me to keep the stove hot past midnight and then went to lie

down in the other room. The rest of the night I was constantly turning the felt-boots in the oven so they would not burn, and I moved the footcloths to see that all of them were dry. Our small house had quickly filled with the nauseating smell of the steam from the wet wool and the sharp odor of sweat emanating from the drying footcloths. The soldiers were sleeping and their snoring kept me awake.

Toward morning, when I had removed all the boots from the oven, I joined my mother in the next room and drooped on my bed with my clothes on. But I couldn't sleep as I had a headache from breathing the heavy air in the house. I put my head under the quilt, which seemed to keep some smell away.

Before dawn one of the soldiers got up, added coal to the stove, and put on the teakettle to boil. My mother heard him, got up, and prepared the tea. I was half-awake but did not get up because I was so tired from not sleeping all night. I heard all the soldiers awaken and search for their footcloths and felt boots. They were complaining that the wool felt had shrunk from the moisture and heat combination and the boots were too tight. My mother told them, "My daughter stayed awake all night to make sure that your boots were dry by morning."

"Aunty," answered one of them, "tell your daughter that we are very grateful to her for doing this. But, regrettably, the boots will be wet again if the cold hasn't frozen that mushy snow."

I heard the splashing of water on the porch as they were washing their faces in the sink-basin. My mother gave them tea with sugar and they sincerely thanked her for it. Then the older soldier said, "Boys, we have to leave now for the rally on the town square. Let's go! Thank you, Aunty, for all your trouble and hospitality." And I heard as one-by-one they saluted and thanked my mother and walked out the door. Suddenly the silence prevailed but the odor still filled the house. I covered my head again with the quilt and breathed the air that was under the covers and finally fell asleep.

I was awoken early in the afternoon by Olga Chernyavskaya, who was very upset as she told us the news, "I heard that the manager of the electric power station was arrested. Are you sure that your uncle was able to leave the town?"

"He left with Herr Hoffman and his entourage," I replied, frightened that the NKVD agents were able to make the arrest so fast.

"I heard that there are many people in front of the Red Army headquarters. I will go to see and hear what is going on there," said Olga. "Maybe I can find out who they arrested. You stay in the house and don't go anywhere. I shall return as soon as I hear any news." And she left.

I said to my mother, "You see how quickly the NKVD agents are in business to catch the enemies of the Soviets. Let's hope that Papa, Igor, Nikolay, and Ivan were able to reach a safe place before the Soviets arrived."

Olga returned late in the afternoon with the good news, "It was not Igor Mikhailovich who was arrested. They arrested the technician who supervised the electric transformer substation. When I saw him as they were leading him to the Red Army headquarters, I was relieved that it was not your uncle." Then she told us bad news. "There is an order from the Red Army headquarters that all workers must present themselves tomorrow morning to the place where they were working during the German occupation. They especially mentioned the electric power station, the bread factory, and the newspaper.

This could have been expected; the Soviet military authorities would want to start the work at these services as soon as possible. But I was afraid to go back to work, where everybody knew that my uncle was the manager during the German occupation. I was worrying about what could happen to me when the workers saw me, and I said to Olga, "I will not go!"

"You must go!" said Olga firmly. "Your work is essential on the control panel," she reasoned. "I think it will be worse if you don't go." And she reassured me, "Everybody who will come tomorrow to the electric power station was working there during the German occupation, the same as you and I did."

Reluctantly, I agreed with her.

"Tomorrow morning I will come to your home and we shall go together," she promised. "This time I will put in a good word for you, as you did for me when you told the Germans that you never heard that I was a half-Jew." My mother agreed with Olga's idea, that it was better for me to present myself for work.

The next morning, when Olga and I arrived at the electric power station, most of the workers were on the ground floor near the office. To our surprise the technician who supervised the workers downstairs on the turbine—the one Sasha called the "midget" when he reproached me for not cleaning the high voltage wires—was there giving the orders. He knew all the workers, what their jobs were and exactly how the electric power station worked.

He ordered the workers in the boiler department to start the steam boilers, and the line-repairmen to check the electric power lines going to the town. He ordered Olga Chernyavskaya to keep all the records intact and to check and see if everybody who worked there had come to work. He ordered Father Velichko, Sasha, and me to check all the switches on the control panel and be sure that the switch to the high power lines to the regional power network was disconnected.

When we came upstairs to the balcony where the control panel was located, Sasha whispered to me, "Don't you think we may conclude that the 'midget' was the Soviet informer?"

I smiled and showed my agreement by nodding, but I put my index finger across my mouth and said, "Sh-sh-sh..." Then I looked around to see if there was anyone nearby who could hear us. Sasha nodded to confirm that he understood my concern. However, his remark made me feel that he and his father were my allies, that I could trust them, and that all three of us needed to be very careful in how we dealt with this new manager.

In a couple of days the electric power station was working at full speed, thanks to the Germans who before leaving gave the order not to damage anything. Father Velichko, Sasha, and I were scheduled to work in the same three shifts as we worked before, and our duties were reduced because there was no connection to the high voltage lines and to the telephone line of the regional power network.

As the station began to work normally, everybody found out that the new manager was really not a technician as he had presented himself before, but a graduate electric engineer who previously had worked somewhere on a big electric power station. The new manager now had time to snoop around and find out about the workers' true loyalty to the Soviets.

He came up to the control panel during my shift and asked me somewhat arrogantly, "Well, where are your uncle and your father? Have they fled with the Germans?"

Why didn't you go with them?"

I had no choice but to tell him, "Because I don't believe in the same ideas as my father and my uncle. I preferred to remain here with my mother."

"But you did work for the Germans!" he reproached me, obviously trying to provoke me.

"So did you!" I answered him harshly.

"I had other reasons," he replied without specifying them and proudly added, "As you can see, I restored the electric power in a few days after the arrival of our Soviet troops."

As he made the great emphasis on "I restored," he stretched his body up to make himself taller, almost standing on his toes. I was tempted to answer him that there was nothing to restore because the Germans ordered not to destroy anything at the station. But I bit my tongue and instead tried to explain my point, "You know very well that during the German occupation the young people had only two choices: they either had to work here for the Germans, or be drafted for work in Germany. I chose to remain home."

"Well, I hope that you shall work now for your Soviet government as well as you worked for the Germans," announced the new manager with pompous enthusiasm and left.

I was so shaken-up by this interrogation that when Sasha came for his shift he knew right away that something had happened to me. He asked, "Is anything wrong? Why are you so upset?"

In a whisper I told him all about the new manager's snooping and interrogating me.

"I told you right from the first day that he was the Soviet informer," whispered Sasha. "Soon it shall be my turn and my father's." Then he consoled me by patting me on the shoulder. "Don't worry, we are safe while they need us to work here. Let's live one day at the time." He made me feel good with his words of concern and advice and I thought, "He doesn't love me, but he cares, and he is a great pal!"

The first and second week we worked without being paid and without receiving bread or anything else. The peasants were not coming to the market and the local population was afraid to take food to the market for fear of being accused of being black-marketers. During these weeks we were all greatly relieved that we were not being subjected to the shooting of the Soviet artillery, not running to the cellars to hide from the shrapnel shell explosions.

But the reprisals by the NKVD, which had opened its doors immediately, quickly spread fear among the population. Everybody had behaved cautiously, trying being to be not too visible to their neighbors and coworkers, who might show their own loyalty to the Soviet regime by reporting others to the NKVD for any small "sin" committed during the German occupation.

According to rumors the NKVD agents had first arrested many women who had German lovers, or prostituted themselves with the Germans, and they were treated with insults, derision, and jeers. Then they arrested others who worked directly for the *Kommandantur* or as Ukrainian guards in the Gestapo and for some reason hadn't left town with the Germans. Sasha was right, those of us who were needed to keep the essential services working, were left alone for the time being.

I went to see my aunt Antonina Yulyevna and my cousins Fredik and Nanochka to

find out how they were doing without my uncle Igor. So far, nobody had bothered them as *Volksdeutsche*. Meanwhile, my mother stayed in contact with her sister-in-law Musya, the wife of her brother Ivan. Musya and her daughter Lyalya were fine. My grandfather brought the news about Katya; the NKVD agents did not touch the wife of Nikolay, and their daughter-in-law Lidia, although Lidia had a German lover.

On the street my mother also saw Maria Sergyeyevna Litvinova, Zoya's mother, who worked in the printing house. She told her that their former editor of the newspaper, communist Mukhin, came back with the Red Army and was in charge of editing the newspaper under the old name. She knew him well because before getting married his wife had rented rooms from her. Although Mukhin's wife had evacuated far into the interior of Russia, he remained with the partisans somewhere not far from our town and was active throughout the German occupation.

Very few Red Army soldiers remained in town, except the agents of the NKVD, the Red Army headquarters staff, and the guards posted in the strategic points in town. The rumors were that the Germans had consolidated their position somewhere west of Slavyansk and were holding the Red Army from proceeding further westward. The third week with the Soviets in town was almost over when one night we couldn't sleep because of the artillery explosions in the distance. They stopped toward the wee hours of the morning and an eerie silence embraced the town. When people got up to get ready to go to work, they were surprised to see German soldiers on the streets.

## Return Of Germans

By Olga Gladky Verro

When it was clear that Germans have returned in town, Olga Chernyavskaya came to my home and we decided to go to the electric power station as usual to work. German soldiers were guarding the station. They asked if we were working there and allowed us to start the morning shift. Father Velichko told me that the night shift had worked as usual and the station had worked all night. Sometime toward the morning the German soldiers came and checked only to see if there were any Red Army soldiers at the station and told everybody to continue their work.

It seems that the Soviets were taken completely by surprise and had to run away without destroying anything at the station or in town. The new manager, "the midget" as Sasha called him, had disappeared from the electric power station.

Herr Hoffman and his entourage and my uncle Igor returned the next day and took charge of the power station. Work returned to the old routine after the high voltage lines were inspected and we were again connected to the regional power network.

The German *Kommendantur* was reopened the first morning along with the other German offices; officers and soldiers returned to town in the next few days, including Karl, who was stationed in our home. My father came home on the third day after the Soviets left. He recounted that there were so many men who retreated with the Germans that it was hard to find a place to stay. "It was the piece of soap that helped

me tempt the elderly housewife, and it helped to show *Deutschemarks* to tempt her husband to let me stay in their home."

In a few days after the Germans returned to Slavyansk life in town got back to the routine that was established under the German occupation. Some men who remained in town when the Soviets made an unexpected breakthrough had disappeared. It was anybody's guess if the NKVD arrested them, or if they retreated voluntarily with the Red Army. But if they did, how did they find out that they were retreating unless they were connected with them as partisans or with the Soviet spies left behind? Perhaps it became dangerous for them to remain when the Germans returned. Among those who were gone with the Soviets was the technician from the turbine department who for three weeks had been the new manager of the electric power station.

The temporary return of the Soviet Army had left some uneasiness among the population by sowing the seeds of doubt about the future, and about the outcome of the war. People had feared the unknown that waited for them. Now no one could predict if the Germans would remain in the Ukraine, or if the Soviets would return and punish them for their work for the Germans even when they had no choice. They felt helpless from not being able to control what would happen to them tomorrow. However, most of the people were provided for well with food because they had collected crops from the land that they cultivated in the summer of 1942 when the Germans allowed every family to plant as much as they could; these provisions were sufficient for the whole winter and well into the spring.

The Soviets didn't resume the shelling of our town for a while and we almost forgot about the cellar. One day my mother went there to get a blanket and found that the cellar was filled with water. It appeared that during the great thaw the water had filtered in from the ground. Karl and his friend had brought many empty shell casings and long wooden boards and had elevated the whole floor. It had reduced the headroom so much, however, that we could only walk bending our heads and shoulders, and we could only hide there during the shelling when it was resumed by the Soviets. But we couldn't sleep there anymore.

We decided to improvise protection from the shrapnel inside the house by placing bags full of sunflower seeds on top of each other along the wall and by sleeping next to them on the floor. However, Karl, his friend, and some of our neighbors continued to run into the cellar at night and stay there until the shelling was over. Toward the spring the water rose even higher and the cellar couldn't be used as a shelter anymore.

In the spring of 1943 even more people than in the previous year took parcels of land and worked hard to plant all kinds of crop. My father and I planted on the same plot that we had last year near the Soap Factory. And we planted vegetables in our courtyard and at the end of the fruit garden. Cultivation of land required lots of work and time during the day. To have more time to do this work, I asked Father Velichko to allow me to work the night shift so I could go early in the morning directly to the field and take care of the growing plants. Now Sasha worked the morning shift and his father in the second shift. I was coming to the station office to have my lunch with Olga and to rest before going back to the field.

Once I came to the office when Olga was not there that day. Boris Martens, the sixteen-year-old boy who was working as a messenger between the office and the

workers in the various departments, kept me company. He was an orphan and lived with some relatives because his brother, being of German origins, had fled with his wife to hide in some village from the NKVD agents, who were arresting men with foreign names. My uncle knew him when he worked at the Soda Factory before. When the Germans came, Boris was registered as *Volksdeutsche* and my uncle took him to work at the power station as a messenger boy. He was smart, quick and reliable in delivering messages in all places where there was no phones. Everybody likes him and he enjoyed his work..

In talking with me, Boris was a little bit shy and at the end of the lunchtime he climbed on the ladder to rearrange some boxes on the top shelf of the high file cabinet. From there he suddenly announced, "Olga, I like you." Then he corrected himself and said, "I love you."

I was so surprised that I could not answer him right away. Knowing that he was alone in the world I couldn't disappoint this young boy and said, "I like you too, Boris. You are a very nice boy. But maybe it is too soon to talk about love."

At that moment someone came in the office and our conversation ended abruptly. After that day I didn't have a chance to be alone with Boris anymore and he was content to smile at me and to give me sweet glances anytime he encountered me at the station. And, since I worked also at night shift, the chance of encounter me was reduced at those weeks.

Usually, the night shift was less busy and except for the synchronizing with the net there was little to do but to watch the panel since all maintenance work was done during the day. However, one night when I was working during the night shift I had a frightening experience. I saw one man climbing the back stairs not those from the turbine room. It was unusual, but in semi-dark I could not recognize if it was one of our workers from the steam boiler department. But once the man reached the control panel balcony and said with a drunken voice, "Go-o-od ev-v-ening," I saw that he was a complete stranger and was either really drunk, or trying to make me believe that he was drunk. One thing made me suspicious right away was that he knew that there were the narrow steep stairs almost hidden in the dark near the wall. But I tried to be calm and polite with him and asked, "Are you looking for somebody here?"

"Ye-es, for you," he answered with a sweet voice.

I tried not to show that I was scared and replied, "But I am working now. You should come to see me when I am free."

He was coming too close to me and I didn't know how to get away from him. At that point the phone rang and I moved toward the phone booth. The man tried to grab me, but I moved swiftly from him and told convincingly, "Let me answer the phone. If I don't answer, the German guard will come here right away to see why nobody is answering it. You don't want the German guard to come here, do you?" The man probably was really drunk not to become suspicious in allowing me to answer the phone.

Once I entered the phone booth, I locked it immediately. It was a call from one of the control panel operators from the power network to notify us about a turbine failure at their station and that he was switching on to his high voltage lines. I quickly called my uncle, notifying him about the stranger waiting outside the phone booth and asked him what I should do. He told me not to get out and to wait in the booth until Herr Hoffman arrived with his men.

The man was looking at me impatiently through the small window in the booth door and I was holding the phone in one hand and with the other was keeping the phone contact on. Indeed after one long minute the phone rang again and Herr Hoffman called me and said to stay calm—they were on their way to the power station. The strange man was now becoming suspicious of my long conversation on the phone and he began to bang at the booth door telling me to open it. I continued to hold the phone in my hand, showing him that I was talking to somebody. They were the longest ten minutes that I had ever had to wait. But I was glad that the man was not touching anything on the control panel. “He is probably really drunk, I thought. If he were a saboteur he would have used this time to do the damage and to run away.”

Finally, I saw from the booth window that Herr Hoffman and his soldiers were arriving carefully from the back stairs. But the man could not see them because he was banging at my door and they were coming from behind; and he could not hear them either because of the turbine noise and his banging. The two German soldiers grabbed him from behind and the third one aimed his handgun at him. I walked out of the booth shaken but unharmed. Herr Hoffman asked me to recount all the details about the incident and then they led the man away.

The next morning when Sasha Velichko came to begin his shift, I recounted to him what had happened and he said, “Where were the German soldiers that are supposed to guard the station at night? You were lucky that it was a drunkard and not a saboteur. Now that the Soviets know the layout of the station the partisans could come to sabotage it any night.”

That week my uncle decided that it was unwise to make me work during the night shift. He talked to Father Velichko and they agreed that Sasha Velichko would work a twelve-hour day shift and Father Velichko would work twelve hours at night. My uncle found for me new work at the transformer substation in town. My job was to finish the electric charts of all the connections and switches and the plant inventory that had not been completed by the technician who was arrested by the Soviets. One girl who was already working there remained to help me. She was Alexandra Boyko, who liked to be called Sasha Boyko. She was a bright and pretty girl with thick blond tresses and was two years younger than I.

It was the end of the spring and we had the whole summer ahead of us to work outside on this project. We were not in a hurry; these charts would really not be needed if shrapnel damaged the wires or the transformers. The lineman could always connect the wires without the charts, and if the transformer was damaged it would take some time to find another one. So we were working leisurely, enjoying the good weather and sunshine and became quite good friends in a very short time.

Sasha Boyko admired me for being so smart in drafting and in understanding how the transformer station worked. During the rainy days we worked in my home polishing the charts and she was making the final draft of the inventory. She printed all by hand and made a neat inventory list. When we went to the electric power station to show my uncle Igor the progress we had made in our work, he showed it to Herr Hoffman, who was very pleased with it. Therefore, Sasha Boyko and I continued our work at the transformer substation.

Sometime during that summer we heard that there was an Italian military unit on Sobor Square. Sasha Boyko and I went to see them. There was a crowd of curious

people standing around. It was an unusual sight to see the exhausted Italian soldiers sitting and lying down on the ground. Their uniforms were dusty and their shoes were worn out. Some of them spoke a little German and they said that they had walked by foot all the way from the region close to Stalingrad. The Germans had sent them back because they didn't like the way they were fighting. The Germans did not provide them with any means of transportation or food and they had to live on what they could find. While we were there two Ukrainian women brought them food wrapped in a white towel. As one of them was giving her gift to a young Italian soldier I heard her say, "Eat, eat, poor soldier. You look so hungry. Maybe somewhere some other mother will have pity on my son and give him food..."

Somebody in the crowd commented, "You know, as these soldiers were crossing the River Toretz, they caught all the frogs that they could find, cooked them and ate them."

"Really?" wondered someone else.

"They must be real hungry to eat such disgusting creatures!" commented another.

And somebody who was more informed about the culinary habits of other countries said, "French and Italians consider frogs to be fine food."

The Italians stayed overnight on Sobor Square. Those who saw them in the morning confirmed that they indeed were walking back home to Italy.

## The Gestapo SD Section

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

Until the beginning of summer 1943 the news of the long battle for Stalingrad was not sufficient to discourage anticommunist optimists and Ukrainian nationalists in Slavyansk from believing that Germany could still win the war against the Soviets.<sup>1</sup> Many were strongly convinced that the Germans would never give up the rich land of the Ukraine. They hoped that the occupied territory of Ukraine would be kept safe from Stalin's hands. Among those optimists were my grandfather, my father, and my uncles; they had no doubt that it was a temporary setback for the Germans.

When the women in our family, my mother, her sisters-in-law Katya and Musya, and I, were beginning to discuss what we shall do "if" and "when" the Soviets came close to our town; our men didn't want to even hear such "heretical" suppositions. Their male pride and uncompromising attitude against the communists did not allow them to recognize that they were wrong in accepting the Germans as the liberators from the Bolsheviks' oppression. Their hate of the Soviet regime and the lifetime of evading persecution for their anticommunist past had blinded them completely.

However, one time, when my mother and I were talking with my father without the presence of my uncles, we pushed him hard to answer our question: "What should we do if and when the Germans retreat from our town?"

My father admitted with regret, "With all the anticommunist articles that I wrote

and published under my name in the local newspaper we could not remain anywhere on Soviet territory. The sword of Damocles will be hanging not only over my head, but also over yours. You know well that, according to the Bolshevik's clichés used to brand all of those who disagree with communists' doctrine, I would be declared, an 'enemy of the people,' a 'traitor of the motherland', a 'White Russian', and a 'collaborator.' For these 'political crimes' against the Bolsheviks I will deserve to be shot. We also know very well that Bolsheviks have no mercy for the families of 'political criminals' and you will finish your life in the concentration camp somewhere in Siberia."

It was for the first time after the occupation by the German Army that my father admitted that his actions could have such tragic consequences not only for him, but also for my mother and me.

Meanwhile life in the town of Slavyansk was proceeding under the rules established by the Germans.<sup>2</sup> Bread was baked in the town's bakery and distributed regularly to those who were working; the newspaper "The New Ukraine" was published every day; the power station was working, as well as all the reconstructed industries supplying goods for the German military; the Town Duma was managing the civilian affairs of the population; people were going to the market every morning; and the young men and women were drafted for work in Germany.

Also functioning for some time was the Gestapo section called *SD Sunder Commando*,<sup>3</sup> also shortly called the *SD Section*, or just *SD*, which was in charge of investigating and referring for punishment the political "sinners," such as former Communist Party members, members of the Komsomol,<sup>4</sup> partisans, saboteurs, and Jews who were still hiding among the local population.

There were plenty of unscrupulous informers who were vilifying anyone whom they resented, or had a grudge about from the past, or anyone they didn't like, or just wanted to harm for any reason whatsoever. The informers didn't have to worry if the information supplied was false—they were not punished for it. They knew that it was the job of the *SD Section* to investigate if it was true or false. The politically neutral population didn't fear much of the *SD Section* activity, although there were several cases of innocent people who were unjustly accused by the treacherous and crooked informers. The anticommunists were not bothered by the activity of the *SD Section* of the Gestapo because they felt that their political views were protecting them from slander by any informer.

At the beginning of June 1943 my father was still working as a manager of the Soap Factory. The master of production at the factory was a Ukrainian ultra-nationalist, Kulchytsky, who originally was from the region of Volyn.<sup>5</sup> He was a large boned, tall man of a rugged Ukrainian peasant stock, and he insisted that people talk to him only in Ukrainian. Right from the beginning Kulchytsky had an eye on my father's position as a factory manager and was openly envious of him. But he was cleverly masking this by flattering him and telling him half seriously, "Orest Mikhailovich, you are too smart for this position. I hope that when you find a more congenial employment for your abilities, you will not forget about me and will recommend me to the German *Kommandant* as your successor."

My father half-jokingly would promise him, "Of course, of course, I shall give you a good recommendation."

During the German occupation there was a strict rule and severe punishment

established by the German military authorities against stealing German goods. The Soap Factory was working to supply soap to the German military; therefore, the soap was considered to be their property. Germans were providing the raw materials for the production of soap, but the civilians did the labor. From the production line the workers packed the soap in cases and the German military picked it up for distribution to their troops.

However, many German officers who were stationed in our town were coming directly to the factory and asking my father to give them a piece or two of soap for themselves, and sometimes they asked for several pieces to send to their families in Germany. Naturally, my father could not refuse to give them whatever they wanted. They were all very polite, but at the same time behaved as if it was their right to come and ask for it. My father accepted their solicitations as a normal behavior of the military during the war and he didn't feel guilty for complying with their requests.

He didn't feel guilty about bringing home a few pieces of soap to help his family. In those hard economic times soap was a good commodity to barter for food. My mother was bartering soap on the market for flour, milk, and other foodstuff. She never bartered it for luxury items, or to enrich us. My father felt that as long as he was fulfilling his obligations to the Germans by producing the established quota of soap, the extra pieces that were discarded as slightly damaged in production didn't have to be officially accounted for. After all, he couldn't provide for his family needs on the small salary in *Deutschemarks* that he was paid by the Germans. Also, not all food could be bought with the *Deutschemarks* because the peasants who brought dairy products and vegetables were only bartering for the items that they needed; they didn't want German paper money.

The soap factory workers, of course, also helped themselves to a few pieces of soap, justifying their actions by similar reasoning, "We are working for the Germans and receive the bread coupons and a few German marks a day, which are insufficient for buying food for our families." They didn't feel that their taking a few pieces of soap from the factory was stealing; they considered it as a natural supplement to their wages. After all, they were used to this pilferage under the Soviet system when they served themselves with the products that they produced or had access to in their place of work. Habits are hard to change, especially during times of economic hardship.

To prevent the uncontrolled disappearance of the soap and to maintain some control and accountability for the German authorities, my father decided, but without consulting the German *Kommandant*, that each worker would get one piece of soap each week as an incentive not to steal it. He told them, "If anyone is caught taking soap on their own, he will be laid off right away." He believed that this system would work, hoping that the workers would police themselves.

In the middle of June my mother was called to the Gestapo SD Section as a witness for one young woman, a former teacher, who lived in town, but who used to work at the hamlet school at Slavyansk Station. The woman was accused of being a member of the Komsomol. An interpreter in the SD Section who was also in charge of interrogation of the civilian population was an inveterate anticommunist Ukrainian man by the name of Khokhlov. He was reporting the results of the interrogations to the German Gestapo officer.

During the interrogation, the teacher told Khokhlov that my mother could testify

on her behalf that she wasn't a member of Komsomol. My mother knew her very casually and never worked with her in the same school; therefore she couldn't say one way or another about her membership in Komsomol. But later we found out that she indeed was a member.

By the end of June my father had made only one distribution of soap to the workers, strictly enforcing the established rule. On the day that he was supposed to make the second distribution of the soap, my father was late coming home and my mother and I were worrying what could have happened to him because the time of the curfew was nearing. Suddenly we heard a knock on the door and to our surprise it was the husband of my mother's cousin Krystya.<sup>6</sup> He worked at the Soap Factory and usually walked home on our street.

After greeting us he said, "I am sorry to bring you the bad news, but you probably don't know yet that Orest Mikhailovich was arrested this afternoon, right before closing the factory." We were shocked to hear this terrible news.

Then he told us about it in great detail, "This happened exactly at the time when Orest Mikhailovich started to make the second distribution of soap to the workers and all of us were standing there in the storage room and waiting for our share. Master Kulchytsky was not there. Suddenly he appeared with two Gestapo agents at the door saying, 'Here is Herr Gladky.'

"One of the Gestapo agents came close to Orest Mikhailovich and in the presence of all workers told him that he was under arrest. Before they led him away, the agent told Master Kulchytsky, 'Present yourself tomorrow morning to Herr Khokhlov at the Gestapo SD Section as a witness that Herr Gladky was pilfering German property by giving the soap to the workers.' And then he added, 'Until further notice from the *Kommandant* you remain in charge of the Soap Factory.' And the agents led Orest Mikhailovich away. All workers were scared and became very upset when Master Kulchytsky announced authoritatively, 'From now on there won't be any distribution of soap. And if anyone is caught stealing it, he can expect to be arrested.'"

When my mother's cousin was gone, my mother said, "People are envious—somebody informed the Gestapo."

"Not somebody," I replied, "I am convinced that it was Kulchytsky who told them to come today and at the right time. He wanted to be sure that they would catch my father when he was giving the soap to the workers. Nobody else could have done it!"

"You are right," answered my mother, "only he knew the exact time and date."

And we were right, because later we found out that before this happened, for some time Kulchytsky had been visiting Khokhlov in his home. He seized the opportunity to get rid of my father and to take his place as manager of the Soap Factory.

"Now that your father was arrested," said my mother, "the Gestapo will come to search our home. We must immediately hide the soap that we have." She went in the bedroom and pulled out the few bars of soap that she kept at the bottom of a big trunk, in which was stored all our winter clothing. She packed it in the market bag and quickly took it to conceal it at the apartment of the couple that used to hide in our cellar. They rented the rooms in the house of our neighbors and it was possible to go there directly from our courtyard without going out on the street.

Some pieces of the soap were hidden in the attic and in the woodshed, but we couldn't hide it on time because to get in the attic we needed to climb on the ladder and

through the small trapdoor in the ceiling of the front porch. But the ladder was in the woodshed where at that time of the evening the chickens slept and they would make a lot of noise if we woke them up. We decided to take a chance and leave the rest of the soap there.

My mother said, "It could be too suspicious to remove all soap from the house. Who would believe that the manager of the soap factory didn't have soap in his home?" And she purposely left a partially used soap on the porch in the soap dish and one new but cracked piece on the shelf above. "They expect to find the soap," she said, "let them find it. They could not tell that we have it hidden somewhere. Here it is, right in plain view."

After my mother returned from the neighbor's house, we sat in the kitchen expecting to hear any moment the steps on our long brick sidewalk leading from the gate to the house. We were scared to have a search and my mother tried to cheer me up by telling me, "So many German officers stationed in town know and respect your father. And all of them at one time or another received soap from him for themselves, even the *Kommandant* himself when he was coming to inspect the factory. Surely, someone will speak on your father's behalf and the Gestapo will free him." It helped to instill in me hope that nothing bad would happen to my father.

Finally, when it became completely dark outside, we heard footsteps and then a knock on the door. My mother went on the porch and I heard her greeting in an innocently cheerful voice, "*Guten Abend!*"<sup>7</sup>

"*Guten Abend!*" they answered. "Are you *Frau*<sup>8</sup> Gladky?"

"*Ya, ya*" she replied.

"May we come in?"

"*Bitte, bitte,*"<sup>9</sup> my mother replied calmly.

As they entered the kitchen, I greeted them, "*Guten Abend!*"

And they answered politely. I saw that they had the insignia of the Gestapo on their uniforms.

"Are you looking for my husband?" asked my mother. "He did not return home from work yet. Maybe there is something wrong at the factory. He usually comes home on time.

"One Gestapo agent said, "No, we are not looking for your husband. We came to search your house."

"A search?" my mother asked with surprise in her voice, "What are you looking for?"

"Never mind," he replied and said to the other one, "Let's get started."

They began to search in the kitchen. First they opened the small wooden trunk where my mother kept the flour that she had only recently bartered soap for. Then they held up a lantern and looked carefully inside the deep wall-oven that we used for storing kitchen utensils and dry foodstuff. Next they looked on top and inside of the cupboard and proceeded to look on top of and under the wardrobe that was standing near the bedroom door. One of them opened the wardrobe and removed my mother's fur coat, which she rarely wore, and placed it on the chair. The other one searched on the bottom and pulled out a pair of my mother's very old style leather bootees that had to be laced up from the bottom all the way up almost to the knee. No one had worn them for years because they were too small for her and for me. He put them on the chair also.

Then they moved to the other room and looked under the beds. One of them climbed on a chair to reach into the deep over-the-oven wall opening and looked inside with the lantern. He there put everything upside-down, all the winter quilts and blankets that we kept there during the summer months.

The other agent opened the big trunk from which my mother had removed the soap before they came. He searched inside with his hands, and probably not feeling anything hard, closed it. Then both of them looked in-side and behind the piano, on the bookshelf, and in the desk drawers. When they finished, one of them asked politely pointing to the fur coat and the bootees, "May we take these?"

My mother extended her arms like saying, "What can I do?" and said, "If you want them, take them."

They exited on the porch where it was dark and searched with the lantern on the big wooden barrel where we kept the water and lifted the cover. On the floor there was a pile of old Soviet newspapers that we used to start the fire in the stove. One agent took the newspaper and wrapped the bootees in it. The other looked on the bench where there was the soap dish with the half-used piece of soap, which he didn't touch. The other one illuminated the wall shelf above where my mother purposefully left the new but slightly damaged piece of soap. He took it and asked my mother, "Where did you get this soap?"

"You know," she answered very calmly, "that my husband is the manager of the Soap Factory. Those are the odd pieces that are discarded during production."

The Gestapo agent took another newspaper from the floor, wrapped the soap in it and said, "We are taking this as evidence that this is all the soap we found in your home." After that, they stopped the search and said politely, "*Guten Abend!*" and walked out the door with their loot.

The next day my mother was again summoned to the Gestapo SD Section and Khokhlov used the tactic of deception to hound my mother against the teacher. He said to her, "You know, that teacher told me that she saw you bartering the soap for milk." He was expecting that my mother would tell him that the teacher was a member of the Komsomol. But when it didn't work, he bluntly asked her, "Tell me where you are hiding the soap?"

"I am not hiding it," replied my mother. "The piece of soap, which the Gestapo agents took as evidence, was on the shelf in plain view."

"One pie-e-ce?" Khokhlov asked sarcastically, squinting his eyes that were hiding behind his small oval glasses in a thin metal frame. "You better cooperate, Madam Gladky, and tell me if the young woman was a member of the Komsomol," insisted Khokhlov trying to force my mother to witness his suspicion. He repeated, "Remember, she informed us about your bartering soap for milk."

"But I don't know if she was a member of the Komsomol," replied my mother and asked him, "Do you want me to lie?"

Khokhlov looked at her with defiance and said, "Remember, Madam Gladky, that your husband is accused of a very serious crime. He is accused of squandering the soap by giving it to the workers and taking it for himself without authorization from the German *Kommandant*. We also have other witnesses who saw you bartering soap for food. And we have witnesses who know how much soap your husband was giving away to the workers and how much he was stealing for himself."

My mother tried to change Khokhlov's opinion about my father by saying to him, "My husband worked for two years at the Soap Factory. He always delivered to the Germans the soap they were ordering, never missing one delivery. The soap he was bringing home and giving to the workers were defective pieces discarded during the production."

Khokhlov was showing no interest in what she was telling him, but my mother was trying to persuade him, "And then, Herr Khokhlov, you know very well that my husband politically is an anticommunist and he demonstrated this in his articles when the Germans put him in charge of the Slavyansk's newspaper 'The New Ukraine.'"

This approach didn't work either on the emotionless interrogator and she raised her voice asking him, "Tell me, who is that base scoundrel that had the impudence to inform on my husband?"

Khokhlov took out of the desk drawer the wrinkled page of the old communist newspaper "Pravda" and showing it to my mother asked sarcastically, "How do you explain this? It was found in your home during the search."

"It's an old newspaper!" protested my mother. "We keep old newspapers to start the fire in the stove."

"But you saved it," replied Khokhlov with sarcasm in his voice.

My mother was exasperated and told him with contempt, "Let me talk to the German officer who is in charge."

With an air of importance Khokhlov said, "I am the interpreter here and I am in charge of interrogating the civilians in their native language. I am reporting my findings to the officer in charge. He doesn't have time to listen to the translations."

"But I can speak German very well and don't need an interpreter," replied my mother.

"Nobody is allowed to speak with the German officer," Khokhlov replied laconically. "Those are the rules, I have to obey them." And he showed his indifference to what my mother was saying by turning his face away from her. Then in a phlegmatic tone of voice he told her, "You may go."

The next day my mother and I went again to the Gestapo and this time we spoke German to the German guard, asking him to talk to the German officer. He referred us to a low-ranking officer to whom we explained that my father was accused and arrested unjustly. We complained that the *SD* Section interpreter wouldn't allow us to talk to the German officer in charge. After listening politely, the officer called on the phone to ask what he should tell us about my father. Then he calmly explained to us, "The case is closed. It was found that Herr Gladky committed the crime and punishment has been imposed. There is no appeal."

My mother and I were devastated. She asked humbly, "Could we visit with my husband?"

"Sorry," answered the officer, "this week all visits are suspended. Come in next week, maybe the orders will be changed."

We returned home completely discouraged about the fate of my father. My mother was not ready to give up and she decided to go to see Khokhlov privately in his home. "Maybe I can convince him to influence the Germans," she said to me.

The next day she went to his home. She returned even more disappointed and recounted to me, "I told him that he knows very well that my husband shares the

anticommunist ideas with him. But Khokhlov was listening without any interest and never looked at me, instead he stared somewhere in the space. And after a short audience he told me in his laconic voice, 'I cannot do anything for your husband. He is now in Gestapo hands.' I got up and left without saluting him."

There was nothing that we could do to help my father at that time, but my mother was determined that she would find out some way to free him from Gestapo hands.

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1. See the chapters "Invaders Or Liberators?" and "The Big Thaw."
  2. See chapter "Two Years of German Occupation."
  3. *SD Sunder Commando* - Not sure about the exact name in German.
  4. Komsomol – The Union of the Young Communists.
  5. A region in the Northwestern Ukraine that had its name from the antique principality.
  6. A daughter of Stepan, the brother of Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy.
  7. "Good evening!" [in German].
  8. Missis [in German].
  9. "Please, please"

## The Beginning of the End of Occupation

By Olga Gladky Verro

During the summer of 1943 it was becoming evident that there was a slow but steady retreat of the German Army on the southeastern front of the Soviet Union. And although the official German news that was allowed to be printed in the local Ukrainian newspaper was always optimistic and full of propaganda in their favor, the general population was beginning to believe more and more in the Soviet radio news that was filtering in to the occupied territory. People were afraid to talk about it because the radios were sequestered from the population right from the first days of the occupation and no one would admit to listening to the clandestine radio for fear of being punished for disobeying the orders of the German military authorities.

In the middle of the second week in July the Red Army made a break on the front line that remained very close to our town, just behind the curve of the Donets River. There was a lot of movement of the German troops. The retreat of the German Army was becoming so evident that lots of people had to make a decision if they wanted to return under the Soviet dictatorship. It was clear to them that this was the last chance to try the road to freedom, which may not open itself again in their lifetime. And those who

were making this decision knew that many sacrifices lay ahead of them and that the unknown was awaiting them. But the strongest incentive for leaving the security of one's own home for the unpredictable destiny was that everyone knew for sure what to expect if the Soviets returned.

The men in our extended family, who hadn't wanted to listen to us women when the Germans arrived in our town, now were talking about the imminent arrival of the Soviets and about the need to escape from their paws. My uncle Igor came to tell us that all the *Volksdeutsche* had been notified to get ready for the evacuation. "How is the situation with Orest?" he asked. "Have you tried to talk to the Gestapo officer?"

We recounted to him all our attempts to help my father that had resulted in failure. "My suggestion for you is not to remain here in Slavyansk," he said. "If they are evacuating the *Volksdeutsche* all the way to Germany, it means that the Germans will be abandoning this place." My mother and I agreed with my uncle's suggestion and before saying good-bye to him I gave him the address of Zoya Litvinova, who was in Germany in an *Ostarbeitern*<sup>1</sup> labor camp. I told him that through her we could get in touch, if we should be successful in getting there. My uncle Igor and his family departed the next day.

The next morning, in a hurry, my cousin Volodya came with his wife Raya to say good-bye to us. They were departing later that day. Shortly after their arrival in Slavyansk, Volodya and Raya began to work in the theatrical group that was entertaining the German troops. Now that the front was coming closer to our town, the German coordinator asked the members of the group if they wanted to get farther from the front line and to continue their work entertaining the German military. He promised to provide them with transportation, food, and lodging in exchange for their services. Most members of the theatrical group agreed to those conditions and their departure was scheduled immediately, much ahead of the other German occupational and administrative entities and troops.

Volodya and Raya said that they consulted with his mother and father, who approved of their decision to evacuate under such favorable conditions. "I have no other choice," explained Volodya, "I am a deserter from the Red Army. You know what they do to deserters. I cannot remain on Soviet soil. Retreating with the German troops may give me the possibility of reaching one of the European countries where I would be safe from the Red Army paws."

"We are on our way home from Volodya's grandfather," Raya said. "With tears in his eyes, Gavriyl Daniylovich blessed us and asked God to protect us on our long journey."

And Volodya added, "Then he embraced us with his trembling arms and kissing us on the forehead said, 'Farewell children... I am old, I probably will never see you again...'"

With sorrow in her voice Raya added, "Poor Grandfather, he looked more frail than usual."

"And you," asked Volodya, "have you any news about Orest?"

"The news is bad," I answered. "And we don't know yet what we will do."

"Sorry to hear this," said Volodya. "But you should not remain here either. With all the anti-Soviet articles that your father has written in the newspaper, the NKVD will

never forgive him or his family."

I told him that we knew this and were also planning to leave, but we didn't know yet how.

"Last evening," said Volodya, "we made our last visit to my mother's aunt Varya and uncle Misha. They are determined not to leave their home, no matter what awaits them if the Soviets return. The aunt said, 'We are old. We always remained in our home and watched come and go the Czar, the Whites, the Reds, the Greens, the Bolsheviks, and the Soviets. And now we will be watching the Germans leave and the Soviets return. We never did anything to harm anybody all our lives and nobody had harmed us. What can the Soviets do to us for surviving the German occupation?'"

"And how about your father?" I asked Volodya.

"My father and mother and my sister-in-law Lidia made a decision that all of them together, and with little Boris, would leave Slavyansk and would try to reach any European state. They are keeping themselves ready to evacuate with the other Town Duma members any day, as soon as the Germans can make a place available for them on the train. My father told me that he would come and say good bye to you."

Raya reminded Volodya that they had better hurry up and they ran away wishing us good luck. They were gone so quickly that I forgot to give them Zoya's address. "Well," I thought, "they probably have someone's address for keeping in touch with their parents. I shall give Zoya's address to my uncle Nikolay when we say good-bye to him."

That day my mother complained that she had some *Deutschemarks* in the drawer of the desk and they had disappeared. "They took them," concluded my mother.

"Who?" I asked.

"Volodya and Raya," she answered.

"Volodya and Raya?!" I asked, astonished with her conclusion. "I thought you meant the Germans who made the search only a few days ago. Are you sure that you saw the money in the drawer this morning?"

"Well, it seems to me that I saw the money after the search," she replied.

"But you are not sure that you saw them there this morning?" I asked her again and told her my opinion, "I think that most likely the Germans took them."

"You don't know," she answered, "that on Volodya's mother's side of the family there was a relative who had a quick hand in making things disappear."

"Yes, you told me about it. But it was the adopted daughter of his mother's aunt who took some shirts from you during the time of civil war!" I replied. "And she is not really his relative."

"Never mind," she said with displeasure.

I knew that there was nothing that I could say to change her opinion and asked her, "Don't you have some money hidden in another place?"

"Yes," she said, "I have."

"Then we don't have to worry about it. That money was only for our daily expenses and you never kept too much in the desk drawer anyway."

Toward the evening we had another surprise. My mother's brother Ivan came to say good-bye and to tell us that he was departing tomorrow morning to fight "those damned Bolsheviks" to prevent them from retaking his dear hometown of Slavyansk.

As Ivan was speaking, we could smell alcohol on his breath, but he was not drunk. He told us that he had enrolled in the army of General Vlasov<sup>2</sup> and that his wife Musya

and their little daughter Lyalya were remaining home. The good-bye with my uncle Ivan was more painful because he was going into battle, not just evacuating as the rest of our relatives. On our minds were the questions, "Would he survive? Would we see him again?"

We were overwhelmed with this exodus of all of our close relatives and many well-respected people that we knew. By this time my mother and I had plenty of time to talk it over and to decide what we were going to do, and our decision was very clear—we cannot remain on Soviet territory, not only because my father had committed the unforgivable 'political sins,' but also because I worked during the German occupation. That probably would be punishable by the Soviets by a deportation somewhere to the hard labor camps behind the Ural Mountains in Siberia. If we did not want to finish our lives in those places, there was no other solution for us but to find a way to travel as far west as possible. The problem was that we needed to find some group that was authorized by the Germans to evacuate on the train because during the German occupation there was no public transportation for the population. At the same time we were reluctant to go until we found out about my father's destiny.

The next morning Boris Martens<sup>3</sup> came to see me. As he was walking on the sidewalk, I hardly recognized him because he was wearing a German military uniform. Suddenly I saw him not as a young boy, as I had considered him; the uniform made the difference in making him look like a young man. I was surprised that he didn't evacuate with the *Volksdeutsche* and asked him why.

"The Germans told me that as a *Volksdeutsche* I could volunteer in the German Army. Well, I decided that it was the right thing for me to do," he said with the conviction of a grown-up man. "I came to ask you what you and your mother are going to do. Will you remain home, or will you evacuate?"

"We definitely cannot and will not remain here," I answered. "We need first to see my father next week, if they allow us to see him in Gestapo." I explained to Boris that we had tried everything, but that we had accomplished nothing.

"It was a bad time for him to be arrested," he said with regret. "I hope that the Germans will release him before they leave town."

"It will be too late," I replied.

"I hope that everything will go well for you," he said. "I cannot stay longer, I have to present myself to my German officer. Here is my military address. Write to me and let me know where you will be. If I am stationed here I will come and see you again."

I accompanied him to the gate.

"Since I don't know where I will be stationed, may I give you a good-bye kiss?" Boris asked timidly.

I turned my cheek to him and he awkwardly tried to kiss me somewhere near my mouth. "Well," he said, exiting through the gate, "I hope that we may meet one day somewhere in Germany."

I smiled and said, "I hope so too."

I slowly returned to the house. In my heart I felt sisterly affection for Boris, but I couldn't disappoint him in telling that I was not in love with him. There was no way to anticipate what would happen to both of us. If we both survived and met again, either he or I might feel differently.

It was already ten days since the Gestapo arrested my father. It was the week

that the Gestapo officer suggested that we try to see my father. Therefore, we went there again and asked if we could have a visit with my father.

"The prisoners are not here anymore. They were all sent away last week,"<sup>4</sup> replied the officer with indifference.

"But where?" insisted my mother.

"I don't know," he replied sternly.

We were devastated.

That week my mother encountered the husband of the young teacher accused by the Gestapo *SD* Section that she was a member of the Komsomol, and against whom she was summoned to testify.

He said that his wife was in the huge Gestapo concentration camp located close to the industrial town of Makyeyevka near Stalino; he made by foot about 150 kilometers to visit her. He said that his wife saw my father there. He explained that the prisoners were behind a barbwire fence, but the visitors could see them from a distance. However, by bribing the Ukrainian guards they were allowed to come near the fence and to talk for a few minutes.

My mother asked him for directions to get there. But he discouraged her by saying that it was too far for us to walk there; it took him several days to walk and he had to sleep somewhere beside the road because it is impossible to find a place to stay overnight anywhere.

Now that we knew where my father was, the first thing we had to do was to get there, to see him, to tell him that we would find a way to leave our home, and to say good bye to him. After long discussions, my mother and I decided that the only way to get on the train and to travel as far west as possible was to enroll at the *Arbeitsamt*<sup>5</sup> for work in Germany. This way we would be brought to Stalino to the regional *Ostarbeiter*<sup>6</sup> recruiting center and, once there, we could try to see my father.

That day my grandfather came to have lunch with us and we discussed our decision with him. He looked frail but didn't complain of anything, neither about his health, nor about the departure of his son Ivan, his grandson Volodya, nor the imminent departure of his son Nikolay; and now we were talking about our departure too.

My mother was worrying about what would happen to her father who would remain alone with his second wife, who was thinking only about feeding her grandson leaving her husband hungry.

"Don't you worry about me," he said, "I am old. I have lived my life according to God's will and I shall finish my life as a servant of God. I have fulfilled my duty toward Him by working on the reconstruction of Sobor."<sup>7</sup> When it was reopened for the glory of God, it was the happiest day of my life. I will pray to Him for all of you who are departing. I will pray that He protects you and helps you to live the rest of your lives according to His design for you. Your duty now is to find your husband and father and to try to save him."

"We cannot save him," I replied promptly. "All we can do is to say good-bye to him."

"Only God knows," said my grandfather with reassuring faith, "what your father's destiny is. If he is not destined to be a martyr, God will guide you in your efforts to help him."

I couldn't understand my grandfather's blind faith in God in those desperate

moments when it was clear to me that our and my father's destinies were looking bleak. But I didn't tell him about my doubts that until now God hadn't helped us to get my father out of the Gestapo cellar.

In the middle of July my mother and I went to the *Arbeitsamt* to see Herr Hahn, the chief of that office. He respected my father and knew him very well for two years, from the beginning of the German occupation of Slavyansk. First, when my father was appointed as the editor of the newspaper "The New Ukraine", and later when he was appointed as the manager of the Soap Factory and he was coming to the *Arbeitsamt* to select workers; on those occasions he had brought some soap for Herr Hahn.

As we entered the office of Herr Hahn and exchanged greetings, he told us right away, "*Frau*<sup>8</sup> and *Frauline*<sup>9</sup> Gladky, I am very sorry about what happened to Herr Gladky."

We recounted to him everything we knew about what happened to my father, about what we had tried to do, and that we found out that he was now in the concentration camp near Makyeyevka.

"How I can help you?" he asked.

I explained to him, "We cannot remain here in Slavyansk; we came to enroll for work in Germany."

Herr Hahn looked at us for a while without giving us an answer. It was obvious that he was debating within himself how to help us. Then he said, "I can enroll you, *Fraulein*, but I cannot enroll you, *Frau* Gladky, because you are older than the people we are ordered to send for work in Germany."

My mother implored him, "You cannot separate my daughter from me. She is already losing her father. Look, I am healthy and able to work as well as any young woman."

Neither my mother nor I had anticipated that age was important for enrolling for work in Germany. My mother supplicated Herr Hahn, "Please, please, allow me to go with my daughter!"

"Well," he decided, "let's get you examined by our doctor, and if he finds you in good health and able to work, I will overlook your age."

He did send us right away to the office of the *Arbeitsamt* doctor, who found us both in good health and Herr Hahn recruited us for work in Germany. He gave us papers stating that we were to present ourselves when the next group of drafted and volunteer workers would be departing for Stalino to the Regional Conscripted Labor Center.<sup>10</sup> He told us that this would probably be in about ten days to two weeks, so we should put all our things in order.

Before we left, he advised us, "You may take with you all your possessions that you can carry as luggage and all the food that is not perishable. The convoy train will be stationed on the tracks across the street from your home, and it will be easy for you to load all your luggage." This was a good suggestion and we could plan ahead what to pack and what to sell or to give to somebody who was remaining in town.

My mother and I decided to sell as much as possible of the things that we could not take with us. The whole week we went to the market and sold clothes and household items. It was very easy because we were selling the items for the *Deutschemarks* and those people who were not leaving the town were eager to get rid of the German money; they would buy anything that they could later resell for Soviet rubles or barter for what they need.

At the market we encountered Maria Segyeyevna Litvinova, Zoya's mother, who wondered why we were selling all those items. She knew the whole story about my father, with whom she had worked for so many years. We explained that we had enrolled for work in Germany and suggested to her that she should do the same and join her daughter there.

"I cannot abandon my house that I had inherited from my mother. I cannot leave all my possessions," she said. "If Zoya returns after the end of the war, she should have a home to live in."

"Zoya cannot return home," I said. "She enrolled as a volunteer to work in Germany. She will be punished by the Soviets for this. And are you not afraid to remain here after you worked for the Germans in the printing house<sup>11</sup> and sold the newspaper 'The New Ukraine' on the corner of Kharkovsky Street? There are many people who will remember this."

She dismissed my argument about being in danger herself and defended her daughter by saying, "Nobody knows that Zoya volunteered to go to Germany."

"Are you forgetting that her edited letter, in which she described how well she was treated in the labor camp in Germany was printed in the newspaper? Somebody has saved those newspapers and will deliver them to the NKVD as soon as they arrive here."

Maria Sergeyevna became visibly agitated, but remained firm in her decision not to leave her house and her possessions. She only told us that when we arrived in Germany, to write to her daughter and to inform her that she was waiting for her to return home.

That week I also went to see Olga Chernyavskaya, who was still working at the Soda Factory, which had been converted to the electrical power station. I told her to send her father to my house and take back their big mirror that we bartered from them for soap. I asked her if she was not afraid that the Soviets would punish her for working for the Germans. She said that she and her father had developed a strategy on how to deal with this. She would first go right away to the village and wait until her mother notified them about her whereabouts. And then she would join her mother and her sister Galochka wherever they were. She promised to come to say good-bye to us before our departure.

We gave some good items to my grandfather and to my mother's sister-in-law Musya, who especially wanted to have all our books. But we were afraid to leave them our house because we were sure that they might suffer reprisals by the Soviets if they were found in our home—the government would for sure confiscate it. At the same time we didn't want our house to be ransacked by the mob. So we came up with the idea of leaving it to somebody who was not our relative. I remembered that our neighbors, the couple who rented the apartment in the house next door, and whom my mother gave the soap to hide before the Gestapo searched our home, were very nice and that the husband played piano. We had a chance to know them better during the time when they were hiding in our cellar during the artillery shelling by the Soviets.

I suggested to my mother, "They would cherish the piano and the collection of sheet music that Papa inherited from his father." My mother agreed and decided that she should make the legal transaction, as a sale of the house, to ensure that they would not be evicted.

The husband and wife were very surprised to hear our generous offer. My mother told them that she was doing this under one condition, "If the situation should change, and we return, you have to promise that you will return our home to us. It is a very remote possibility, but it could happen." They readily agreed to the deal. In a few hours my mother made a fictitious sale; they paid us a small amount in German money that they had, and the deal was registered in the Town Duma's office, which was still functioning.

While making the transaction in the office of the Town Duma my mother saw her brother Nikolay, who told her about an emotional farewell with his son Volodya and their daughter-in-law Raya. He said that they all agreed to look for each other in Germany, if their destiny would favor all of them reaching that destination. He told her that they had already packed all of their possessions and were waiting for when the German authorities would notify them about the availability of space on the train.

In a few days my mother's brother Nikolay, his wife Katya, and their daughter-in-law Lidia and her little son Boris had evacuated with a group of other members of the Town Duma. They had to depart in such a hurry that they didn't have the time to come to say good-bye to us. I was sorry that I didn't give Zoya's address to my uncle and this meant that we couldn't easily find each other if we got to Germany.

On the thirtieth of July 1943 we received a notice from the *Arbeitsamt* to see Herr Hahn. He told us that we should be ready the next morning for the departure and that the train would be parked on the railroad tracks near our home. Then he gave us a letter and said, "Give this letter to the *Lagerfuhrer*<sup>12</sup> in Stalino. He is my old and good friend and a very fine person. I asked him to help you to find your husband and father. I am sure, if it is possible, he will help you."

In saying good bye, Herr Hahn shook our hands and sincerely wished us good luck in finding my father. We thanked him wholeheartedly for all his help and wished him a safe return to Germany.

As we were walking home, my mother said, "It seemed that we were ready for departure, but now that it shall be tomorrow morning, we still have a lot to do this afternoon."

"First," I said, "I will bring all those things that we put aside for the Grandfather and then stop to say good-bye to Musya Davidenko."

"And I," said my mother, "will call my sister-in-law Musya and tell her to come and take what she wants from the remaining things; she especially wanted to have our books."

In a great hurry I placed the items for my grandfather and a bicycle for Musya on a small cart and walked fast to his home. As I entered the courtyard, my grandmother grabbed right away all the foodstuff, and without any concern that I had brought it for my grandfather said, "Ah! This is a good food for my little grandson! Valya<sup>13</sup> will be very happy."

"Grandmother," I replied with resentment, "I brought this food for my grandfather. Look how skinny he is! He cannot come for lunch to our home any more, or to Nikolay's home. You know that Nikolay evacuated and we are departing tomorrow morning. You have to feed my grandfather with this food!" Then I added almost with sarcasm, "Doesn't Valya's lover, the German officer, bring enough food to feed her baby-boy?"

My grandfather said to me with resignation in his voice, "Never mind, my dear

*Lyalyechka*, it cannot be changed. She thinks only about feeding her grandson.”

I knew this, but such blatant disregard for my grandfather upset me so much that I quickly piled the rest of the things I brought on his big tailor’s table. I said only “Good-bye” to the grandmother without even embracing her.

My grandfather said, “I shall come this afternoon to your house.”

I took the bicycle to my friend Musya Davidenko’s house, which was not too far from where my grandfather lived. I told Musya that we were departing tomorrow morning and gave her my bicycle as a good-bye gift. She was not surprised that we were leaving; her family felt that they could remain because all of them had worked only at the slaughterhouse, which they considered to be a safe place, in terms of how the Soviets would consider it when they arrived in town. However, Musya told me that she didn’t know what to do with her boyfriend Nikolay Deryuzhkin, who used to be the secretary of the Komsomol cell of our Ten-Year-School and who had deserted from the Red Army. She complained, “He comes now and insists more than before that we get married right away. I am afraid if somebody denounces him, I will be in trouble too.”

I consoled her, “The Germans soon shall be out of town.”

“And then?” she asked, “When the Soviets come, what would happen? He is a deserter.”

“Oh!” I said realizing the situation. “He is in double jeopardy. My only advice is not to hurry in marrying him. Wait and see what happens to him.”

I was sorry that I could not stay longer and had to leave my friend. I wished her good luck in remaining home and waiting for a solution to her problem with Nikolay. She wished me a safe journey and good luck in leaving my home and departing into the unknown. With tears in our eyes we embraced each other, feeling that we would never see each other again. During these two years of German occupation neither of us had any old friends remaining in Slavyansk; we had gotten attached emotionally and felt a bond of sisterly love. As a souvenir I left Musya my bicycle. On my way home I felt very sad, as if I had just lost part of myself forever.

On my return home my mother and I collected and packed all the nonperishable food, including a big sack of dry bread that my mother was able to preserve for emergencies. We have divided between ourselves all the *Deutschemarks* that we received from the sale of things that we could not take with us. Each of us hid a big bundle of this German currency in our own purse. It had been issued for circulation in the occupied territory and we had some doubts that it could be used in Germany. But I remembered that Karl, a corporal who stayed in our house for more than a year, collected this money and took it home to his family when he had a two weeks leave. So we had hope that this money could be useful if we reached Germany.

In the early afternoon my grandfather came for lunch and we ate his favorite Ukrainian *borshch*, and my mother gave him what had remained to take home. After the meal all three of us sat on the sofa in the kitchen and we recounted to my grandfather about the letter that Herr Hahn gave us and about the plans we had to visit my father in the concentration camp near Makyeyevka. When he heard about the letter from Herr Hahn, he said, “You see, Lyalya, God acts in mysterious ways. When you see your father give him a kiss from me and tell him that I am praying to God to help him.”

My mother was worrying about her father and said, “Papa, Lyalya told me how Anna Petrovna<sup>14</sup> behaved today with the food that I sent for you. How will you survive

without having some meals in our home or in Nikolay's home?" And she concluded, "She would let you die from hunger. Maybe it would be better if you go live with your nieces in the village of Nikolskoye. There they at least have vegetables and potatoes that they grow in their gardens."

"I married my second wife before God and made a promise to take care of her," her father replied. "No, my dear *Tonyechka*, as long as my hands are working and I can sew, I am the breadwinner for me and for her. If she does not treat me fairly, she will answer for this before God. Don't you worry about me. As I told you already, I am an old man and have lived my life as best as I could, according to God's teachings. You have your life ahead of you and should do what is best for you and for your husband. Find him and with God's help save him. My blessings go with you." Before leaving, my grandfather promised to come the next morning and to stay with us until our train departed.

Toward the evening Olga Chernyavskaya came to see us as she was returning home from work at the Soda Factory electrical power station. I told her the news about our departure.

"My dear friends," she said, "you have no other choice. It is the best solution for you."

"Yes," I agreed. "And what will happen to you?" I asked her. "Are you not afraid that the Soviets may punish you for working for the Germans?"

"Oh, I have already told you before, that I will hide for a while in the village until my mother lets us know where she is living; then I will join her there and wait until the NKVD reprisals are over. And then, if David<sup>15</sup> returns home, I will probably marry him." Olga couldn't stay longer, because she had to be home before the curfew began.

"This is our last good-bye," I said. "We shall never see each other again."

"You were a good friend," said Olga. "It is hard to find good friends like you in such difficult times as we have had during these two years. You probably saved my life, after someone informed Gestapo that my mother was a Jew. Herr Hoffman believed you and your uncle Igor, that you knew that my mother was Russian." Olga wished us good luck on our journey. She embraced my mother and I accompanied her to the gate, where we embraced and kissed each other. I was very sad knowing that I was losing my friend forever.

My mother had already notified our neighbors that to prevent looting they should move into our house immediately after we departed. We had our supper with what was still remaining from that day's meal and I washed the dishes. We made the last check of all documents and filled the tall enameled canteen with water for the journey.

We slept only on the uncovered mattresses without bed linen, which was all packed in our luggage. We had set our alarm clock for five o'clock in the morning to be sure to rise early and begin to bring our luggage close to the gate. We had a lot of suitcases, bundles, bags, and boxes, which we packed carefully to be a size that we could lift.

It was our last night in our home and we were very conscious of it. I had an agitated sleep and often woke up to check the clock, being afraid that the alarm would not ring and we would oversleep. Only toward morning did I have a few hours of uninterrupted sleep.

1. Eastern workers.
2. The army of Russian and Ukrainian volunteers that was organized by General Vlasov and supplied by the Germans to fight against the Soviets.
3. See chapter "Two Years Under the German Occupation."
4. On July 9, 1943.
5. Labor Office [in German].
6. Eastern workers.
7. The town's cathedral. See the chapter "Invaders or Liberators?"
8. Mrs. [in German].
9. Miss [in German].
10. Translation of the camp's name is approximate.
11. See the chapters "Invaders or Liberators?" and "Two Years Under the German Occupation."
12. Lager leader.
13. Nickname for Valentina; a wife of Dmitry, the elder son of the second wife of Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy.
14. The name of my mother's stepmother, as she usually called her.
15. David Gorelyk, Olga Chernyavskaya's boyfriend from school days.

## Leaving Our Home

By Olga Gladky Verro

On Saturday, July 31, 1943 my mother and I got up at five o'clock in the morning.<sup>1</sup> This was a sad and unforgettable day for us because we were leaving our home and we felt that it was forever. I was tense and felt butterflies in my stomach. I had a glass of milk with some bread and right away we began to take the luggage into the courtyard. My mother was bringing it from the house to the open porch and I was taking it from there to the front gate.

I looked out on the street and saw that about a dozen freight cars were already standing on the railroad tracks from Kharkovsky Street down beyond our house. I locked the gate to keep the luggage safe from curious strangers, who were already coming to see for what purpose the train would be used.

Until we put it all together along the brick sidewalk leading from the house to the gate we didn't realize that we had so much luggage. In the house the suitcases, bags, boxes, and bundles were placed everywhere and it didn't look so impressive.

"Do you think that they will allow us to take all this with us?" I asked my mother.

"Herr Hahn told us to take everything we wanted as long as it is packed in a way that we could carry each piece by hand," she answered. "Well, we have done as he instructed. There shouldn't be any problem."

Soon we heard knocking at the gate. It was my grandfather. "Did you eat something this morning?" asked my mother.

"I had some tea," he said.

"Come in the house," she told him, "I am preparing sandwiches for the road and you can have some with the milk that I left for you."

Grandfather was eating so avidly that one could see he was hungry. My mother said to me, "He will not survive for long now that we will all be gone."

I agreed.

Once in a while I was going to the gate to see what was going on near the convoy train. At about seven o'clock I heard the voices of the German soldiers on the street and called my mother. We walked out and stood near our gate. There were many soldiers, one standing near each freight car; some were at the corner of Railroad and Kharkovsky streets, and some were on the other corner in the direction of Mulberry Garden. They were preventing curious onlookers from coming close to the train. One of the soldiers came and told us that we could not stay there. I told him that we were departing on this train. He asked me to show him the papers from the *Arbeitsamt*. I went in the house where they were in my handbag. The soldier checked them and said to wait until the *Arbeitsamt* officer came with the list of people who should be on the train.

Soon other people began to gather on the sidewalk mostly young girls and boys, sixteen years old and older, who had been drafted for work in Germany. They came with their parents, who were seeing them off. Slowly the sidewalk on our street was full of people as if it were a railroad station platform full of passengers waiting to depart with this train. The soldiers were checking everybody's papers and were sending away those who didn't belong there.

When the chief of the *Arbeitsamt*, Herr Hahn, came with several other officers from his office he gave the order to the soldiers to select the departing youth. They were led in groups of twenty-five to thirty to the freight cars to be checked by the *Arbeitsamt* officer against the list. After, everything began to function according to his orders, Herr Hahn came to our gate and led us to the nearest car; he told the soldier that we would load our luggage there and he shook our hands again wishing us a safe journey. The soldier was so impressed with the respect shown to us by Herr Hahn that when I was trying to help my mother to climb up in the car, he took over and helped her himself. I was bringing our luggage to the car and handed it to my mother who was arranging it all together in one corner. My grandfather was sitting on the stool near the gate safeguarding our belongings.

Our neighbors to whom we left our house came out and pitched in helping me to bring the heavier items. When everything was loaded and adjusted neatly in the corner of the car, my mother gave the neighbors the keys to our house and said with obvious emotion in her voice, "Take good care of our house and the things that are remaining in it. It took us many years and a lot of hard work to be able to buy them. I hope you will appreciate our gift." They thanked us and promised to preserve the house and the piano, which were the two most valuable things. The wife and husband embraced us with sincerity and wished us a safe journey. Then my mother told them to go right away and move their things into our home before someone decided to loot what had remained in it.

When the other cars were filled to capacity, the *Arbeitsamt* officer who was in charge came to our car and began to check in the drafted girls and boys. They were climbing in the car with small suitcases and bags with food for the journey. Only now did we become aware of the anxiety and pain of these young people who were drafted

against their will for work in Germany. They were crying as they saluted their parents, who were standing on the sidewalk and also crying. Some were saying to write home immediately upon arrival at their destination; the others were repeating over and over "good-bye", and some were just sobbing and waving their hands.

My mother and I were taking turns staying with my grandfather, who was trying to keep himself from crying, and we did the same. He was telling me to take care of my father and to save him from the concentration camp. It was strange, but he was convinced that we would save him. At one point he told me, "Dear Lyalya, we shall not see each other again. Be a good girl and take care of your mother and father." He stayed near our gate until everybody was accounted for and Herr Hahn gave the order to close the doors of the freight cars. Then we embraced and kissed my grandfather and he blessed us three times with the sign of cross, "God will be with you. I will pray for you and your father, for as long as I live." These were his last words that we heard. As we returned to the car, we saw him standing near our gate waving to us. He looked so frail and vulnerable, and I began to cry.

The soldiers had closed and locked the doors of the cars and we remained in semidarkness, with some light filtering through the small narrow windows under the ceiling of the car. My mother and I sat on our suitcases holding hands, trying to give each other strength in this difficult and emotional moment. The young girls and boys were trying to find a comfortable place to sit near the wall to have some support. The train waited a while until the locomotive arrived and we felt the jolt of the cars as it was attached to the convoy train. We heard the voices of the people standing on the sidewalk shouting, "Good-bye! Good-bye!" And the train began to move slowly.

I said: "Good-bye, my home..."

My mother was silently crying and said, "Good-bye, Slavyansk..."

My mother and I placed a thick blanket on the floor, placed pillows against the pile of our luggage, and sat on the floor preparing for the trip. Everybody was exhausted emotionally and most found some way to accommodate themselves on the floor the best they could.

During the night the train stopped often and waited for long periods at the stations. It was strange, but my mother and I fell asleep and slept well, as if we had left behind all our past and were on our way to search for my father. And being in the train calmed down our anxiety that we had experienced in these last weeks since the arrest of my father. It felt like we were beginning the next chapter in our lives.

In the early hours of Sunday morning, the first of August, we arrived in Stalino. We were left in the locked cars until the *Lagerfuhrer* with many soldiers and several trucks had arrived. They opened the cars one by one and told us to get in the trucks. My mother asked some boys if they could help us with the luggage and offered to pay them well in *Deutschemarks*. Two of the boys agreed and carried it to the truck. When we arrived at the destination they also helped us to bring it in the building.

The Regional Conscripted Labor Center<sup>2</sup> was housed in the building of the former Ten-Years-School. It was a three-story brick building with large classrooms and big windows. I left my mother with our pile of luggage in the hall and went to find the room to which we were assigned. In the room there were already about twenty young girls that had arrived a few days before from other places in the region. There were rows of bunk beds and one of the girls showed me one that was free in the corner of the room. I

was glad that it was near the window and we could store our luggage against the two walls, but most of all, I was happy that I could stay together with my mother.

When I began to bring our luggage, one piece after another to the room, I saw that the girls were watching me with suspicion. I thought, "They probably are wondering why we were able to take so much with us." But they treated us with cautious respect.

We settled down, placed our blankets and pillows on the straw mattresses, and then went to inspect the cafeteria and had some hot herb tea. Then at noon we had a hot soup made from some kind of vegetable broth and thickened with flour. However, we supplemented it with the sandwiches that we brought from home, as did almost all the girls who brought food with them for the trip to Germany.

While we were eating in the cafeteria I suddenly heard a joyous voice calling me, "Olga, my dearest, I cannot believe that it is you!" and Sasha Boyko ran toward me and embraced me. "What a pleasant surprise! When did you arrive here?"

"This morning," I replied.

"Then we were traveling in the same train," concluded Sasha and added, "Now I am not alone anymore!"

I was also glad that we would be traveling together. I hadn't seen Sasha for a while after we finished our work at the transformer substation.

Sasha told me that with the blessings of her parents she had also enrolled as a volunteer for work in Germany. She explained how she and her parents came to this painful decision. "During the last weeks in Slavyansk it was obvious that the Germans were ready to retreat. Everybody who didn't want to remain was leaving town. It was very hard for my parents to make a decision about my future. But at the end they told me that it was better for me to go to Germany. They told me that if the Ukraine went back under Soviet rule, I should remain in Europe after the end of the war." And with sadness in her voice Sasha said, "The good-bye was very painful because we were convinced that it was forever... that there was very little hope that we would see each other again..."

"That's how we felt saying good-bye to my old grandfather," I said. And Sasha Boyko and I embraced each other and for a while sat in silence on the bench.

"At least you are not alone; you have your mother with you," Sasha said.

I embraced her and said, "But now you have me, your friend, with you." It cheered her up and we promised to stay together during our trip to Germany.

The quantity of our luggage didn't go unnoticed by the *Lagerfuhrer* and the next day when he was checking the newly arrived group, he invited my mother and me to come to his office for an interview the next day. We handed him the letter from Herr Hahn.

After reading the letter, *Lagerfuhrer* asked us, "How is my friend Herr Hahn?"

"He is fine," I answered and added, "He sends you his greetings."

"*Danke schön*," he said and asked, "How long did you know Herr Hahn?"

"My mother and I met him only recently," I replied, "but my father knew him for two years. He met him right in the beginning when the Germans came to our town and Herr Hahn was the chief of the *Arbeitsamt*."

"In the letter Herr Hahn writes that he holds your father in high regard," said *Lagerfuhrer*, "and he is asking me to help you to find him. In order to help you, I need to know exactly what happened to him and why he was sent to the Gestapo concentration

camp.”

We told him the whole story without concealing anything. When we finished, he sat there for a while without saying a word.

I thought, “Maybe it was not such a good idea to tell him everything.” But I was wrong.

He looked at my mother and me and said, “Well, if my friend Herr Hahn believes that your father deserves to be helped, I believe him. I cannot promise you anything, but I will try. I will call you later during this week to talk more about this matter.” And he told us that we could go to our room. My mother and I were surprised that he treated us kindly and agreed to help us right away.

For supper we had a piece of bread and again the same hot soup. Like us, most of the girls had some food from home and did not bother to eat much of the soup, just enough to put some hot liquid in the stomach. Sasha eat at our table and told us that when she came to see me in the afternoon and didn’t find us, the girls in our room asked her if she trusted us. They were very suspicious about the *Lagerfuhrer* calling us to his office. Sasha reassured them that she knew us well and that they had nothing to fear from us.

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1. See the chapter “The Beginning of the End of German Occupation.”
  2. The name is descriptive, not the exact name of the Center.

## The Red-Haired German Angel

By Olga Gladky Verro

The first week after our arrival *Lagerfuhrer* talked to us several times in the evenings. When we came to see him the second time, he was in a very good mood and told us right away that he had a good friend, a young man at the Gestapo headquarters in Stalino, who was in charge of provisions for the concentration camps. He said he would ask him if he could help us find out what camp my father was in. He told us that it would take several days until he could see him.

Then the *Lagerfuhrer* talked with my mother and me about our life under Soviet rule and asked why my father was an anticommunist. He was pleasantly surprised to find out that my mother and father were teachers and he wondered that I as a girl had studied electrical engineering. He was especially interested in why we spoke so well German. Then he told us that he was a professor in a German university and knew Herr Hahn very well because he was also a university professor.

“What a coincidence,” he said wondering himself, “My friend from the Gestapo Hans Schmidt,<sup>1</sup> was also a school teacher. This means that we all are educators!” He talked with us for several hours and when he looked at his watch he said, almost excusing himself, “It is already past eleven o’clock. I am sorry that I kept you so late. But I enjoyed our conversation. Do you mind if I call you again some evening? There’s nobody here that I can have interesting talk with in German.”

We, of course, agreed. As we were returning to our room, my mother said to me, "It is good that he likes to talk with us. We need to have him as a friend."

And, indeed, the *Lagerfuhrer* invited us several times to his office in the evenings and was very informal and friendly, making us feel at ease. He was a very educated man and was especially curious to know more about life under the communist dictatorship, about which we could tell him plenty. And he was interested in Russian literature, which my mother knew well and was glad to share with him. We could see that he was very pleased talking with us, as if it was distracting him from and making him forget for a while about the boring task of managing the camp.

After about one week, the *Lagerfuhrer* called us and all excited announced, "My friend from the Gestapo agreed to help you. Here is the pass for you, *Frauline*, for tomorrow morning to go and see him. He gave me explicit instructions on how to find him. As you go in the main door of the Gestapo, there are some Ukrainian policemen. Do not talk to them in Russian. Talk to them in German. They will send you to the German guard; tell him that you are bringing a message from the *Lagerfuhrer* to Hans Schmidt. The guard will tell you how to find him." And the *Lagerfuhrer* added, "You will recognize Hans right away because he has the most beautiful copper-red hair."

I thanked him, "*Danke schön, Herr Lagerfuhrer.*"

The next morning I went to the Gestapo headquarters and did everything as the *Lagerfuhrer* instructed me. The German guard gave me directions to find Hans on the third floor of the building. Hans greeted me in a friendly manner and told me that *Lagerfuhrer* asked him to find out which concentration camp my father was in. I told him that one person from our town told us that he was in the camp near Makyeyevka.

"What was the approximate day when your father was deported from your town?" Hans asked me.

"On the ninth of June, I believe."

Hans brought in several registers of the prisoners and took the largest register, which was about eight to ten centimeters thick, and said, "If he is in the lager near Makyeyevka, we should find his name here."

Diligently he checked the names of the prisoners and finally, after about half an hour, he found the name Gladky. He checked all other data with me, such as his age and what town he was from. Everything matched. We both gave a sigh of relief.

"I assume that you want to go to see your father," he said and explained how to get there by foot from Stalino.

As I returned from the Gestapo headquarters, the *Lagerfuhrer* immediately wanted to know if Hans had found my father.

"Yes, yes, he did," I answered promptly. "He is a very fine young man, he was so helpful. He even gave me directions on how to get there."

Right away *Lagerfuhrer* gave my mother and me a pass for the next day and ordered us to return the day after.

Sasha Boyko knew that my father had been arrested and I decided to tell her that we were going to see him in the German concentration camp. I asked her to keep an eye on our luggage while we were away. And if our roommates asked her where we were, she should tell them that my father was sick and we were going to visit him in a hospital.

We made three small bags, one with dry bread, and another with sandwiches and other food to bring to my father, and one with sandwiches for us. We went to sleep very

early to be ready to depart at dawn.

The morning air was cool and we walked fast across the city of Stalino. Then we had to walk through several abandoned coalmines on a large path covered with a thick layer of coal dust.

The sun was already hot and we had to slow down our pace. The path ended on a country road on which we walked several miles before reaching a small hamlet. Then we turned into a dirt road winding through fields with crops that were ready to be harvested. This was the last hamlet before the German concentration camp.

In the hamlet we found a bazaar bustling with activity. It was clear that many people were using it and that it was serving visitors who could barter with the peasants for food to take to their loved ones in the concentration camp.

From there the path went uphill through the fields right to the gate of the concentration camp. We arrived there at about the lunchtime. Many visitors were standing on a large trampled-down section of a field that was located at a reasonable distance from the camp gate and from the barbed wire fence.

On the other side of the fence, about fifteen to twenty meters from it, were the prisoners. They had just finished eating their lunch and some were sitting on the ground while the others were standing. Silently, everyone on both sides of the fence was searching with their eyes to find their loved ones.

Along the fence several Ukrainian policemen stood, allowing only a few visitors at a time to come to the fence. The Ukrainian policemen were taking bribes from the visitors, checking the small packages to make sure they contained only food or clothing, and only then allowing the prisoner to come to the fence to salute their loved ones, to talk for a few minutes, and to get the package.

"Do you see Papa there? Asked my mother.

"No. Maybe he is not looking for us," I answered.

"Let's move toward the fence and ask the policeman if your father is here," said my mother.

As we walked toward the fence, we saw one prisoner who began walk toward us very slowly. We couldn't recognize him as my father, who was skinny; this man was all swollen and walked with his feet far apart from each other because his legs were also swollen. The Ukrainian guard came to get his bribe and my mother put in his hand a large bill of *Deutschmarks* and he left us. We waited until the man slowly came closer and only then could we recognize from his distorted facial features that it was my father.

"*Tonyechka*<sup>2</sup>... *Lyalyechka*<sup>3</sup>..." moaned my father with a pitiful voice and with tears in his eyes.

"Papa! Papa!" I exclaimed crying and embracing him.

"Orest! My God! What happened to you? We couldn't recognize you," my mother asked anxiously while she was embracing him and mixing her tears with his.

My father grabbed my mother's hand and put his golden wedding ring in it saying, "Keep it, before somebody takes it from me when I die. My days are already numbered."

"Why are you so swollen?" I asked him.

"The camp *Kommandant* shoots all weak prisoners in the fields. But if I am sick like this, the Ukrainian policemen don't send the sick prisoners to the fields. So I drink lots of water with salt and become swollen."

"But you are killing yourself!" I reproached him.

"That's right," he replied. "The sooner, the better. The Soviets are coming. I have no hope for the future. I don't want to be sent to a Soviet concentration camp. It is better that I die before they arrive."

My mother gave my father the sandwich with the lard and he ate it hungrily while listening to her saying, "There are some more in the food package and in here is the dry bread. You can soak it in water or in the soup that they give you here."

I said, "Herr Hahn has enrolled Mama and me for work in Germany. We are waiting in Stalino for a departure of the convoy train."

"That's good," approved my father. "I am glad that at least you will escape from the Soviets. Forgive me for all the harm I caused you by don't listening to your warnings..."

The Ukrainian guard came and said, "That's enough, the others are waiting."

We kissed my father and I told him, "If the convoy train does not depart soon, we will come to visit you again. Good-bye, Papa."

"Good-bye, my dearest women," he replied, embracing us again.

We returned to the visitors' crowd and my father to the prisoners' and we stayed there just looking at each other and occasionally waving our hands, like saying to him that we are still here. Finally, the Ukrainian guards gave the signal to the prisoners to form a column and led them to the fields to collect the potato crops. And my father had to leave and go in his hut where the Germans guards could not see him.

Some visitors were friendly and told us about the accommodations for the night. We had to go to a house located not far from the camp and pay a fee to the peasant for allowing us to sleep outside on the hay near a huge haystack. My mother decided to ask the peasant if he could give my father some bread or farmer's cheese, or other food if we paid him in advance. The peasant was not sure how he could do this without anybody seeing him, but he agreed to try. My mother gave him a handful of *Deutschemarks* and he promised to do his best.

We accommodated ourselves outside on the hay and ate the sandwiches. Tired as we were, we fell asleep before it was dark. Suddenly, sometime before midnight, we were awaked by the sounds of the search flares exploding in the sky with a dry crackling sound that seemed like fireworks. Somebody commented that the Soviets were not too far away.

Soon after, the sky and the ground were well lit and intensive artillery shelling began. We could detect from the sounds of the explosions somewhere on the other side of the hill that the shells were of much heavier caliber than we were used to in our town. The shelling went on for a long time and we couldn't fall asleep again.

Now we saw that there were many people around us lying on the hay. We could hear their comments, "Hear how the Soviets are pounding."

"Soon they will be here."

"What will the Germans do with the prisoners?"

"I heard that they will take them with them when they retreat."

"It is a huge number of prisoners. Who will guard them?"

"The Ukrainian guards. They cannot remain here anyway. You know what will happen to them if they remain?!"

"Ya-ah..."

"But they deserve it for working in this place."

"Sh-sh-sh..." somebody hushed the imprudent talkers. And everybody quieted down.

The next morning most of the visitors were gone home, because all the prisoners had been led to the fields and would not return to the gate until lunch. However, my father being all swollen couldn't work and he came with the other sick prisoners to the camp office to check out and saw us standing at the visitors' place. We again gave the bribe to the Ukrainian guard and were allowed to talk with my father a little bit longer than yesterday because there were only a few visitors at that time.

This time we told my father in more detail about how his and my mother's brothers had already departed from home. We told him how we left our home and were now waiting for the convoy train that could be departing for Germany anytime soon. My father approved of our decision to go to Germany and wished us good luck. I told him that my grandfather was convinced that we would find him and that he was praying for him and was sending him his kiss. We gave Papa our sandwiches that we had saved for the day and he ate them avidly right away. The Ukrainian guard told us that it was time to leave and we embraced my father; I promised to come and visit him again, if I could.

We walked back to Stalino with empty hands and stopped at the bazaar in the nearby hamlet and bought some food for our lunch. Our return time was much shorter than our time getting there. Because it was couple hours before the curfew, I suggested to my mother, "Let's go to see Aunt Tanya's<sup>4</sup> apartment. Maybe we can find out what happened to them."

"It is a good idea," said my mother and we went there.

The apartment was in a semi-basement with windows on the ground level and we could see that it was empty. We went down the steps and saw that the door was open. We entered with trepidation and painful emotion.

The apartment was empty and only pieces of old newspapers were scattered on the floor. It didn't look ransacked, but it was empty. I commented, "It looks as if they were able to leave with all their possessions, including the furniture."

"They have probably left with the Zagotzerno<sup>1</sup> where Solomon was working," my mother said.

I agreed. And we left with mixed feelings of joy and sadness about their destiny.

After we returned to the Regional Conscripted Labor Center the *Lagerfuhrer* called us to his office and asked the news about my father. We recounted to him that my father was in a terrible state of health, and that the *Kommandant* of the Concentration camp was not sending those prisoners who were very weak and ill to the hospital; instead he was getting rid of them by shooting them because they were not able to work. The *Lagerfuhrer* sympathized with us and said that he would send us to see his good friend Hans in the Gestapo again to ask him if he could help us in some way.

After a few days I went to see Hans again. He listened compassionately about my father's being swollen and to my surprise he told me, "You are in luck. On Monday, the twenty third of August, the *Kommandant* of the concentration camp is going home to Germany on a furlough and another officer from the Gestapo here shall take charge of the lager. I shall be going there with the new *Kommandant* on Monday or Tuesday. You need to go and see your father before and advise him to sit near the camp's office in the morning on those two days. When the new *Kommandant* and I come to the

camp's office, I will bring to his attention that your father should be placed in the hospital, because he needs medical attention. Let's hope that he will listen to my suggestion."

I thanked Hans several times before leaving his office. But he told me, "You really should thank your *Lagerfuhrer* for this because he pleaded with me to help your father. When my friend asks me to do him a favor, I do my best to do it."

It was so unbelievable that it could be done so simply that neither my mother nor I had hope that it could really happen. But the *Lagerfuhrer*, who was sincerely helping us to save my father's life and was following each detail in our saga, said that it was worth a try. He told me that he would give me a pass to go see my father and to give him these instructions.

On Saturday I visited my father and took him some more food. When I told him the instructions that Hans gave for him, he couldn't believe that it could be done, but he promised me he would sit on the bench near the lager's office in the morning on Monday and on Tuesday and said, "I will be patiently waiting for the red-haired German angel."

And I left my father with the faint of hope that a miracle could happen and that he might have a chance of getting out of concentration camp, at least for a short time to gain back his strength.

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1. Not sure about the last name.

2. Diminutive of Tonya.

3. Diminutive of Lyalya.

4. See chapters "Tatyana Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Tatarskaya" and "Volodya's Sweetheart Raya."

## An Unexplainable Coincidence

By Olga Gladky Verro

On Tuesday evening the *Lagerfuhrer* called my mother and me in his office and told us, "I trust that you won't tell anybody in the Center what I will tell you now." And he looked at both of us to reassure him that we understood that the others shouldn't know this information that could stir panic. "I was informed today that the convoy train to Germany shall be departing any time now. Regrettably, I don't know exactly when it will arrive here. This would be the last convoy train with conscripted labor departing from Stalino, because this Center will be moved farther from the front line."

Then he looked at me and explained further, "Therefore, if you want to go to Germany, as you told me, tomorrow will be the last time that I can give you one pass to visit your father, to take him some food, and to say good bye for the last time. This is for your own good because you don't want to miss this convoy train and to remain here." And he gave me a pass for Wednesday and I had to return on Thursday afternoon.

This sudden news about the imminent departure of the convoy train astonished us and made my mother and me apprehensive, because it was not allowing us enough

time to see if the new Kommandant would place my father in the hospital. Until that time, my mother and I were hoping to somehow accomplish our goal of getting my father well because so far everything had seemed to work in our favor.

But now we were desperate because we had to leave my father behind, probably to die in the concentration camp. With the front line moving rapidly closer and closer, the prisoners would be either forced to march farther to another camp and my father would not be able to walk very far in the condition he was in, or they would shoot the prisoners before the arrival of the Soviet Army. Either way my father would die.

But the weak light of hope would not get extinguished in our hearts. My mother and I didn't dare tell this to each other, but in our sad glances we could see the way we felt. "Maybe tomorrow will bring us good news. Maybe someone, maybe God, would help us..."

We hurried to prepare a bag with clothes and food to bring to my father. This time we had to bring him warm clothes for the whole winter, wool socks, a scarf, flannel underwear, high boots, quilted pants, a *kapelyukha*, as was called a fur-lined hat with ear flaps, fur mittens, and an old *kuzhukh*, a short coat made from the sheepskin with the fur on the inside. Inside the linings we sewed some *Deutschemarks* and some rubles.

In addition we put in lots of food, a big bag of dry bread, and several cups of sugar. My mother insisted on including two bottles of fused butter, a piece of lard, and some tobacco. The bag became full to capacity and was so heavy that the two of us had to lift it. I said, "I don't know if I will be able to carry it all the way to the concentration camp." But my mother made up her mind that everything was essential for my father to survive through the winter. "You must, you must, bring it all to him," she repeated again and again.

That Wednesday was a very sad morning for my mother and me. This was the last time that I would go to visit my father in the Gestapo concentration camp near Makyeyevka. Early in the morning my mother helped me to put the bag on my back and asked me with concern in her voice, "Can you carry it, my dear daughter? Try to collect all your strength. You have to carry it for about twelve kilometers to reach the concentration camp. Remember, that it is the last time that you will be seeing your father... He definitely will not survive the winter..." She was trying to be strong but the tears were pouring from her eyes. She accompanied me to the exit door and told me, "Give your father a kiss from me and embrace him lovingly." I gave her a quick kiss and left in a hurry. I heard her trembling voice saying, "God help you..."

I walked quickly all the way to the railroad tracks because it was downhill. After the railroad, the street was uphill and I had to stop several times to rest. I didn't dare remove the bag from my back because I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to lift it and put it on my back again. Instead, I rested once in a while, supporting the bag by leaning with it against the walls of the buildings. The sun was still very low in the sky and the streets were still filled with the cool night air. Some rare passers-by were looking with sorrowful eyes at me, small and skinny, as I was barely visible under that big and heavy bag. The courage of despair was giving me strength that I didn't know I possessed. "I will make it," I was encouraging myself. "I will rest once in a while. I have to make it at any cost!"

When I arrived at the outskirts of the town, the sun was already high and had begun to scorch the naked ground. The landscape, as far as I could see from my bent

position, was certainly not encouraging for me. The ground and the road were completely covered with a thick soft black coal-dust carpet. The road was winding between the ruins of abandoned mines, high cones of black discarded rock, and the skeletons of mutilated wooden structures. Most of the time I was looking down at the ground where, between the black rocks lying on the sides of the path, once in a while I could see withering shoots of sickly looking grass covered with coal dust. I thought, "The few attempts by nature to grow some plants here are in vain; everything dies off as soon as it begins to sprout." I felt alone in the middle of everything that was dead.

As the morning hours advanced toward noon, the hot sun was striking the earth without pity and the pungent sunrays were absorbed avidly by the black coal dust. The air was so hot that I felt I was walking in an oven. As I raised my eyes for a moment, the contrast between the black ground and the limpid sky almost blinded me. And as I looked again on the ground, I could see fiery-red spots dancing on the black dust. I could not find even a little shadow where I could stop to rest. The air was dry and I was thirsty, but knew that water could be found only at one partially functioning mine that was so far away I couldn't see the top of its cupola yet.

I was still very far from my final destination when I began to stop often to rest, but I didn't dare put the bag down; I was afraid that I wouldn't have the strength to lift it again and put it on my back. Every time that I began to walk again I felt that I was becoming weaker and weaker, that my legs felt very heavy, as if they were made of lead, and I could barely lift them up. My head felt as if it were clenched tightly in a vice, making my temples throb faster and faster...

Suddenly I felt like I had abandoned my body and was flying around it and observing how it was struggling, not able to help it or to stop my silent crying. I could see as tears descending on my cheeks and then, as they were falling on the road, breaking into many minute little balls; then, and instead of being absorbed, they were enveloped in a thin membrane of coal dust and running like quicksilver in all directions on the black soft surface of the dust.

But I didn't want to give up, I couldn't! In my eyes, obscured by tears, I had a vision of my father; his body and face were so swollen that I had a hard time recognizing him, his spirit stifled by the loss of hope. I couldn't leave him in that condition... I thought, "He would not live for long. Maybe I can help him a little. Maybe what I bring him will give him one or two extra days of life... I must help him... I must..."

In that moment of desperation and sincere desire to help my father I felt like being detached from the earth to seek help from some superior power. *Oh, God, God!* I silently called him. "If you really exist, only you can help me. Oh, mighty God, only You, may possess the superhuman power to help me. I ask you humbly to have mercy on my father. Give me the strength to reach him.

"It is the first time in my life that I address my prayer to You, a prayer that comes from my heart. You cannot delude me in my first flicker of faith in you. It is not my fault that I don't know even one Christian prayer because it was considered a real sin by the godless communist doctrine. Forgive my parents who couldn't teach me to believe in you. They feared that I might say something about their teachings to somebody and get them in trouble and be dismissed from teaching in school. Only my grandfather taught me how to cross myself and told me that I should do it only when nobody could see me."

I was still looking from outside at my small body, which was dragging its feet in

that soft arid black dust and carrying the heavy bag on its back, as if I had the penance to expiate some sins for eternity. My mouth and tongue were dry and there was not even saliva to moisten them.

Because I was oblivious to the surroundings and because the footsteps were muffled by the soft coal dust on the path, I hadn't noticed that one woman had caught up with me. For a while she walked by my side without even saluting me. Then her deep sigh brought me down to earth and into my body.

"E-e-ekh... Poor girl, you are also carrying a heavy bag like mine." And since I didn't answer her right away, she continued to tell me, "I went to barter some old children's clothing for wheat and corn grain. I have three hungry little children that are waiting for me at home."

I finally saw that she also carried a big bag on her back. "On this road," the woman continued, "one can no longer find anybody to give a ride. The Germans took most of the horses away. And they don't give any more rides to civilians, as they used to only a few weeks ago. They are afraid of the partisans and the spies because the front line is already too close."

Her presence and her talking distracted me and made it easier for me to walk and to reach the partially working mine where we could find some shade and running water, although it was dark and tasted like mud and smelled of gas. But it was water and it was cool. We quenched our thirst and washed our faces. I felt that my spirit was partially restored, but I was not sure about my strength. As we rested, the woman continued to talk about herself, but I told her only that I was taking food and winter clothing to my father who was very sick in the German concentration camp.

"I heard," commented the woman, "that the prisoners there get really bad treatment. People say that the German *Kommandant* shoots the weak and the sick when they cannot work. And the Ukrainian guards, God punish them all, treat their own kind like dirt, except when they're bribed with food and money and even gold that the relatives bring for them."

The woman got up and said, "We have to start walking again. We have to walk together for a while and then I shall turn to the left on the road leading to Makyeyevka, but I live in the hamlet not far from there. And you need to turn to the right; if you walk slowly as before, you will have to walk until late in the afternoon before you reach the lager." She helped me to put the bag on my back and commented, "Poor girl! God is merciful, He will help you."

There was little consolation in her comment but I said, "At least I will be walking on the road winding through the fields where it will be cooler than here in this black inferno."

Finally, we reached the road where we had to turn and walk in opposite directions. We saluted each other, feeling sorry to lose the companionship that had given us comfort. The woman walked a few steps and said, "I shall pray for you!" Then after walking farther from me she suddenly stopped, turned toward me, and began to walk back. I couldn't understand why until I heard a faint trot of a horse and saw a horse carriage appearing from the bend in the road.

When the woman was almost a few paces from me, she placed herself in the middle of the road and waited for the carriage to come near.

"Hey, good day, Stepan!" she addressed the coachman. "I see that your business

is going very well. How is your family?"

"Very well," answered the coachman, stopping the horse. And the two of them exchanged a few phrases.

Meanwhile the woman whispered to me, "I know him a little. I will try to convince him to give you a ride."

Then she said to him, "Listen, Stepan, could you do a charity and give this girl a ride to your hamlet? Look how tired she is, poor girl."

"Oh, no, good woman, I don't want to risk my skin. It is absolutely forbidden to give rides to civilians. And then, this carriage is for the officers only!"

"What a shame," replied the woman with the renewed insistence, "because this girl is the niece of the mine's engineer's wife... What is his name? The one that lives in your hamlet."

"Kovalenko,"<sup>1</sup> suggested Stepan.

"I think that's him... Well, if he finds out that you refused her a ride, it's for sure he wouldn't be happy with you."

I was listening with fear to the woman's spontaneous invention of my relative. I was afraid of being discovered as a fraud if he decided to bring me to the engineer's home, or if we encountered him somewhere on the road. And I whispered to the woman, "What are you saying? You want to put me in trouble?"

"Hush up," she whispered to me. "Let me convince him to take you. You are not in a condition to walk much farther. God himself could not have done better than this chance of encountering this carriage."

As we were exchanging our opinions on this matter, the coachman was scratching his head and thinking about the woman's words, obviously trying to make the right decision. Then he hesitantly asked me, "Are you really the engineer's wife niece?"

I was ready to say "no," but the woman didn't allow me to answer and quickly said, "Of course she is! Her parents sent her here to stay with her aunt because in the town all the girls are conscripted for work in Germany."

And without waiting for the coachman's consent, she quickly grabbed the bag from my back and placed it on the carriage; then she pushed me on the backseat, whispering to me, "Hurry up, before he changes his mind."

Then, all happy from her success of having done a good deed, she hurriedly told the coachman, "All ready! Go, go, Stepan. See you soon! Give my regards to your wife!"

"Good-bye, little girl," she said to me and, as we drew away, I saw her still standing there and waving to me.

A thought flashed in my mind, "Maybe it was God that send her to help me." But I quickly dismissed this idea, "No, this is not possible. God would have found a much better and honest way without tricking the poor coachman with lies."

The coachman told me that he was going to the hamlet that was closest to the German concentration camp. And I said, "Thank you, thank you." He thought that I was saying it to him. But my thanks were directed toward whomever or whatever had helped me. Maybe it was just coincidence to encounter the good-hearted and smart woman. Or maybe it was my destiny to be born under a lucky star, or maybe it was help sent to me by God, who heard my prayer, or maybe it was my grandfather, who was praying for me as he promised.

The coachman was trying to chat with me to find out more about me. I think he

was a little suspicious about what the woman had told him. But I was trying to change the conversation and talk about the war, the frontline that was coming closer and closer, and about what was happening in the town where I lived.

At one point on the road we encountered a flat four-wheel carriage called a "break"—it is made for four passengers to sit two on each side and the coachmen in the front. It was a carriage that was used by the peasants to drive them to the fields. A small and skinny horse pulled it.

"Halt! Halt," we heard from the German officer who was riding on it and obviously going in the opposite direction. Both coachmen stopped the horses; the officer jumped down, and screamed, "Where are you driving with that girl? Don't you know that this coach is only for German officers?!"

"Ya, ya, Herr Officer," stammered the frightened coachman. And tried to explain in Russian, "She is the niece of engineer Kovalenko's wife."

"What? What? Engineer?" the German officer asked him authoritatively.

Suddenly, I decided that I had to defend the coachman and addressed the officer in German, "Herr Officer, I am the niece of the engineer Kovalenko's wife."

This answer calmed him right away; he glanced at me quickly and said, "I am in a hurry and need this carriage and this better horse to drive faster into town and return tonight. Take your bag and move to the other carriage. It is going back to the hamlet."

"*Danke, danke schön, Herr Officer!*" I thanked him promptly and rushed with my bag to the carriage. I was so happy that it would take me to the same destination; it didn't really matter to me that this horse was slower. It didn't matter that the "break" was bumping me up and down on each bump in the worn-out road. The important thing was that the heavy bag was off my back and my legs were resting.

The new coachman heard what the first coachman had explained to the officer that I was related to the engineer Kovalenko and, as soon as I got on, he asked me about this. Again I had to find out some way not to say much about it.

"Well," I said, "a long time ago my mother told me that my aunt got married to a mining engineer living in these parts, but I forgot his last name. On my way here I encountered a woman who told me that it was probably the engineer Kovalenko. And when we encountered Stepan, he confirmed that indeed Kovalenko lives in this hamlet. When I get there, I have to see if he is the one who is married to my aunt. I hope that he is because with this closeness to the front line I won't be able to return home."

"Oh," said the coachman, "then you are not sure about him?"

"No, but I hope. My aunt is the only one of my relatives that can help me." Then I changed the conversation and began talking about the war, the hard times, and food shortages.

We were already driving between the fields and uphill and I could see far up, behind the trees the first houses of the hamlet. Suddenly we saw a small two-wheeled cart driving toward us and there was a coachman and a woman on it. As it came closer, the woman raised her hand and ordered us to stop.

"That's the interpreter for the Germans," explained my coachman.

Meanwhile, the woman got out of the cart and in a commanding tone asked my coachman, "Who is this girl? Don't you know that you cannot give ride to the civilians?!"

"I was driving the German officer into town and Stepan was returning from the town and was bringing the girl on the coach. The German officer told Stepan to turn the

horse and take him in town. And he ordered me to bring the girl to the hamlet. It seems that she is the niece of the engineer Kovalenko's wife." The coachman gave this lengthy explanation to defend himself.

"Never heard that Kovalenko's wife had a niece!" replied the interpreter and said, "Never mind, I am in a hurry and need you to drive me to the next hamlet." Then she told me, "Take your bag and climb on the cart. The coachman will bring you to the hamlet."

I grabbed my bag and the new coachman helped me to put it on the cart and helped me to climb up. Then I noticed that this horse was small and very skinny and walked slowly. The two-wheeled cart was old, squeaky, and was rocking from side to side on the bumps of the unpaved road. Even the coachman was an old man. But the hamlet was already in full sight.

The old coachman asked, "Are you the niece of the engineer Kovalenko's wife? Do you want me to take you to his house?"

"No, I want to go to the market first to buy some gift for my aunt. The woman told me that there is a good market in your hamlet."

"Yes, it is pretty good. There are lots of people coming here to visit the prisoners in the German concentration camp and they barter many good things that they bring from home. There is a good market today. You will find many things to choose from."

"Good, then I may find something for her. Take me to the market," I replied.

"Do you want me to tell Kovalenko that you are coming?"

"Oh, no!" I exclaimed. "I want it to be a surprise."

"Ah," he answered as if he was approving my idea. "Then I shall not mention it to anybody."

"Thank you, good man, thank you." And he explained to me how I could find their house in the hamlet.

It was almost noon when we reached the market. The old coachman helped me with my bag. I put several *Deutschmarks* in his palm and thanked him for the ride. I waited until he had turned the horse and driven away, and then quickly walked through the rows of the sellers without even looking at their wares exposed neatly on the cloth placed on the ground.

From here I had to walk up the steep hill between the fields of potatoes that extended all the way to the Gestapo concentration camp. But now I was rested and, being close to my destination, I had renewed strength.

As I walked on the dirt road, I thought, "What a strange coincidence, that there were three vehicles one after another that were going in the direction that I needed to go, and I was allowed to climb on all of them without even showing my identity. That woman who stopped the first vehicle was really clever in convincing the first coachman to take me by telling him lies that she invented on the spur of the moment. All that I had to do thereafter was to continue to maintain the false identity that she gave me."

It was past twelve o'clock when I arrived at the main gate of the concentration camp. The prisoners were sitting on the ground and eating soup. I was trying to see if I could find my father among them. He probably was not looking at the visitors since he didn't expect me, as I had only seen him on the weekend. I came closer to the gate where a Ukrainian guard stood, a big strong and rude man with a bullying expression on his face, as if he were the slave-owner of all those poor prisoners. He asked me arrogantly, "What do you want?"

"Where is my father, Orest Gladky?" I asked him timidly.

He paused for a few minutes expecting a bribe from me. I handed him a bunch of small denomination *Deutschemarks*. Before answering me, he slowly put the money in his pocket, collected the saliva in his mouth, and spit it through his teeth; then with an expression of disdain he said, "He is not here. We don't need moribund prisoners who cannot work."

"Where is he? What happened to him?" I asked anxiously. But the guard had walked away from me without dignifying me with the answer.

The answers flashed in my mind, "It was too late... Maybe they shot him, as was usually done with the very sick prisoners... Maybe the red-haired benefactor from the Gestapo could not convince the new Kommandant to send my father to the hospital..." My heart was ready to jump out of my chest and silently I began to cry.

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1. Not the real name.

## By the New Kommandant's Order

By Olga Gladky Verro

I walked slowly from the gate of the concentration camp toward the nearby cottage of the peasants to ask for a place to stay overnight near the haystack where all the visitors slept. The peasant's wife, who was always so reserved with visitors, this time came out with the smile and seeing me crying said, "Don't cry, God is merciful. Your father was very lucky; maybe he will get well in the hospital. God helped him already by allowing him to get out of here. Let's hope that he shall also help by restoring his health."

I was astonished to hear all this and couldn't find the words to ask her for the details. I only thought, "My father is alive! He is in the hospital! We should be grateful to our red-haired German angel. He really did what he promised."

The woman invited me inside the house and explained what happened. "The new *Kommandant* came here on Tuesday with a red-haired officer who is in charge of the provisions. The officer pointed at your father sitting near the office commenting something. The new *Kommandant* ordered right away that your father be brought to the hospital in Makyevevka. Early this morning, my son drove him there."

Then the woman began to apologize for her husband for not keeping his promise to take my father the food for which we had paid him in advance the last time my mother and I came to visit my father. "It was too dangerous," she said. "The old *Kommandant* was very severe the last week before his departure."

I felt that the woman couldn't figure out why my father had been singled out to be

brought to the hospital. I thought that maybe she suspected we had some connections with somebody in the Gestapo and she was afraid that we might report her husband for stealing money from the relatives of a prisoner by promising to take him food, something that was absolutely forbidden. But I was so happy with the news that I couldn't be bothered with such a small matter.

"May I stay overnight on the straw outside?" I asked her and pulled money from my pocket to pay their usual fee.

"No-o, no, no," she stopped me. "You don't have to pay anything for tonight. My husband owes you money." And she added, "You may leave your bag on the porch, it will be safe. When it gets almost dark outside, before the curfew, come back and we will let you to sleep on the front porch because anything could happen to a young girl alone with all those people sleeping together on the straw."

"Well," I thought, "they must be really scared if they are giving me such royal treatment." I took some bread and lard from my bag and went outside. I sat on the straw and ate avidly. "I am so hungry," I thought. "That's probably from so many emotions today.?"

But I couldn't complain. In my mind I reflected on what happened today, "Everything had gone so smoothly, it was as somebody had planned it. It was almost unbelievable that what happened to me was only a chance. Was it God who had pity on me after I prayed to him to help me? Or was it a combination of the good will of several people, who, in the midst of this war and all the misery and atrocities, remained good human beings ready to help other human beings."

One woman came and sat next to me saying, "Today the Ukrainian guards were like animals, rude and arrogant, and were allowing very little time to visit with our loved ones. No bribe, no matter how big it was, could help to buy more time to remain together near the barbed wire fence. Did you see your loved one?"

"No," I replied, "my father was transferred to Makyeyevka in the hospital."

"How lucky for him!" exclaimed the woman. "Maybe he can remain there long enough to be liberated by our boys."

I couldn't answer her positively on her comment and emitted only a deep sigh that she could interpret her own way.

"My husband is a very strong man, like a bull. The front is coming closer very fast. Maybe he will be lucky and be liberated by the Red Army, if the Germans and Ukrainian guards don't shoot the prisoners at the last moment."

Several other women joined us and cautiously shared their complaints about their loved ones imprisoned in this concentration camp. Each had some reason not to reveal the whole truth about why their husband, brother, or father was arrested and deported here.

From their descriptions, all their loved ones were innocent, but someone had denounced them either as being a partisan, or as a Red spy, or as a communist, or as a conspirator against Germans, or that they were heard speaking badly about them. Most women were saying that it was not true; they believed that it was revenge by someone who had a grudge against him, or against the communists in general; or it was because of envy that he lived too well before, or now; or it was any of a million reasons that the malevolent people could justify their lies against the other human beings. I knew that the master of the Soap Factory wronged my father because he wanted to take my

father's place on the job. But today I was not in the mood to be angry even with him.

The sunset came quickly and everybody hurried to the peasant's house to pay for his or her place to stay overnight on the straw outside. One woman commented, "I hope that tonight the Soviets don't make fireworks in the sky and shoot the artillery shells as they did the last time I was here."

When the traffic at the door of the cottage owners had stopped, I went there to sleep on the enclosed porch. The woman brought me an old blanket and her husband told me very politely, "My son will be going to Makyeyevka tomorrow morning and shall be glad to give you a ride to the hospital. We will not charge you anything. It will compensate for the money that your mother gave me for the food for your father." I thanked him for his offer.

"Why are they so polite and good to me? I thought. I don't believe that they suddenly became so conscientious. They must believe that my father had help from the officer from the Gestapo headquarters in Stalino. That would explain their efforts to persuade me that they are good people." I didn't really care why they were treating me so kindly and I concluded my reasoning with the proverb, "All's well, that ends well."

Early in the morning on Thursday, the twenty-sixth of August, the peasant's son carried my bag to the field cart and allowed me to sit next to him on the driver's seat. We began our trip from the Gestapo concentration camp on the winding road through the fields and then turned into a more traveled road leading to the small town of Makyeyevka. Although it was very early, we encountered several women going toward the camp.

I asked the young man, "Are those women going to the camp?"

"There is no other place to go on this road," he replied.

For a while we traveled in silence. Then almost cheerfully he said, "You know, only yesterday morning I drove your father in this field cart on this road to the hospital. He will be all right," he reassured me, "if you give a good bribe to the doctor. She will keep him there for a long time as long as you can afford to keep her happy bringing her gifts."

"Thank you for your good advice," I said while thought, "As if I didn't know that without bribes nothing could be done these days."

"There are also Ukrainian guards that will expect to be bribed if you want to visit your father often and stay with him for a long time," he added.

"Ah," I said with surprise, "there are other prisoners in the hospital?"

"Only those who were able to give very large bribes to the German who is in charge of the camp infirmary."

"I see..." I replied.

"Who did you bribe to send your father to the hospital?" he asked me without hiding his curiosity. "Because as the new *Kommandant* arrived with the red-haired officer from the Gestapo headquarters and they saw your father sitting near the camp's office, the *Kommandant* immediately gave the order to send him to the hospital. And then he reprimanded the German in charge of the infirmary for not sending your father to the hospital sooner."

"Well," I replied, "maybe the new *Kommandant* is a righteous person obeying the military rules to the letter on how to treat the prisoners and my father just happened to be there when he arrived."

"It is very strange," replied the young man. He seemed suspicious that I was not telling him the truth and added, "My father believes that it must be somebody very important from the Gestapo headquarters in Stalino."

I answered, "Your father may believe what he likes to believe, as long as he is not spreading false rumors about important persons in the Gestapo headquarters. You better warn him that he may pay for such rumors very dearly."

"Oh, no, no. My father does not talk about such things with anybody!" he exclaimed, fearing that he talked too much.

After my warning he didn't insist on discussing this subject anymore and we talked only about neutral things, such as the prices of food and how far from here the front was now. Then I asked him, "How far is Stalino from Makyeyevka?"

"On the main road it is about twelve kilometers."

"Maybe I will be able to return to Stalino today," I explained, because my mother will worry thinking that something bad happened to me."

We had already entered the town of Makyeyevka and the young man had showed me the road that I should follow when returning to Stalino this afternoon. Soon after we had passed that road, we were traveling along a very long wall that looked like a wall of a prison. I asked him, "What is behind this wall?"

"That's the hospital where your father is. They have a big garden," he replied, "the main gate is just behind the corner."

The young man drew through the main gate and stopped the horse. He took my bag and said, "I will accompany you to the prisoner's ward. It is better that I introduce you to the Ukrainian guard."

Indeed, it was a good idea because the guard knew him well. The young man told him that it was all right to let me see my father at that time in the morning because I had to return to Stalino today. He brought my bag in the room where my father and another prisoner were.

He saluted my father and said to him, "Hey, do you remember me? Look who I brought to you!" And he left right away, saluting him and me.

I was only able to say to him, "Thank you for everything."

And then I rushed to embrace my father. The encounter was with lots of tears, but also full of hope in both of us that things from now on should turn for the better.

After only a few minutes the Ukrainian guard entered and without being very subtle asked, "Do you have money?" Then he shamelessly extended his hand toward me. Without answering his question, I put a large *Deutschemmark* bill in his hand and he immediately went out in the hall and allowed me stay with my father.

My father's roommate was almost cured from whatever illness he had and it seemed to me that he could be dismissed any day from the hospital and be returned to the lager. As soon as my father and I finished embracing, his roommate began to ask me lots of questions and was constantly interrupting our conversation with my father. He was asking me about the news in the camp, about the front line, and asking me to do numerous chores in town for him.

Finally, I told him politely, but firmly, and loud enough so the Ukrainian guard sitting outside the open door would hear me, "Listen, I told you all that you wanted to know. I don't live here in town and therefore cannot do anything for you. I have to be in Stalino before the curfew. Now let me visit with my father and talk with him."

The Ukrainian guard had heard me; he walked in the room and told the man, "Hey, you! Shut up! The girl has paid me to visit with her father, not with you!" The man was not happy with his order, but sat on his bed and didn't bother us anymore.

My father and I had so many things to tell each other. But we couldn't talk in a normal voice, and most of the time we had to whisper because we didn't want the roommate or the Ukrainian guard to hear us.

"Your red-haired Gestapo officer did what he promised," whispered my father. "As soon as he saw me sitting on the bench near the camp's office, he pointed at me and said to the new *Kommandant*, 'That man is very sick and needs medical attention. The last thing we need is to start an epidemic in this camp.' He even smiled at me when the *Kommandant* called the German who was in charge of the camp infirmary and began to scream at him.

"Why such sick prisoners as this man not sent to the hospital? Do you want to start an epidemic in the camp? Send him immediately to the hospital in Makyeyevka!" Then he called the head of the Ukrainian guards and ordered that all guards in the camp should bring the sick prisoners to the infirmary to be examined. Then he turned to the German from the infirmary and said, "You shall examine them well and all those who are seriously sick and need medical attention should be brought to the hospital."

My father wondered how we were able to get help from the Gestapo officer. I said, "It all started when we went to see Herr Hahn in the *Arbeitsamt* in Slavyansk..." After listening to the whole story my father said, "One never knows who your real friend is. You know, before the war Herr Hahn was a professor at the university. He is a very intelligent man. Every time I came to the *Arbeitsamt* to select workers for the Soap Factory, he would take time to talk to me. He wanted to know about the education in the Soviet Union, especially about the freedom of teaching in the schools and universities, about the programs, and how the communist indoctrination was conducted."

"Well," I said, "his friend, the *Lagerfuhrer* of the Regional Conscripted Labor Center in Stalino, was also a professor at the University and a good friend of Herr Hahn. And the *Lagerfuhrer's* red-haired friend in the Gestapo headquarters was a teacher before the war. As you can see, there is solidarity among educators!" I made a pleasant conclusion.

"Now let's talk about the difficulties ahead of us," I said with caution. "You see this big bag. In it are winter clothes for you and as much food as we were able to put in it from what we brought from home." I retrieved a piece of lard and dry bread from the bag and said to Papa, "Moisten the bread with a little water and eat as much as you can eat, don't save it. You need to build your strength. There is also some sugar in the bag that you can use to sweeten tea." Papa began to eat the bread and lard with avidity and listened to me without interrupting.

"The reason I brought all this for you in the camp is that the convoy train to Germany shall be departing very soon. Even the *Lagerfuhrer* does not know exactly when the train shall arrive in Stalino. But Mama and I are on the official list. This means that we may soon depart for Germany and you, Papa, will remain here. Let's hope that the doctor will be able to make you feel better. I hope that we will be able to see you again if the convoy train doesn't arrive soon."

"I am glad that you can get away from here," replied my father embracing me.

"Until now everything has gone better than we expected. It seems that it was our

destiny to find all this help from several good people in finding you. The important thing now," I emphasized, "is to restore your health as soon as possible. You will need to eat good nutritious food to regain your strength. We can pay the doctor to take good care of you," I explained. "There is no problem with money. We were able to take a lot with us because we sold many things before leaving home. Everyone was convinced that the Soviets would arrive very soon and everybody who was not planning to leave home was getting rid of the *Deutschemarks*; they did not even bargain for the price. We have a lot of German money, Papa. Maybe we could even bribe the Ukrainian guard watching you here... Maybe we can pay him and help you to escape from here."

I looked at my watch and said, "Papa, I have to leave because I need to reach Stalino before the curfew."

We got up and my father said, "My dear Lyalya, I listened to you and all at once realized that you are not my little daughter any more, but you have become a young woman who can make decisions and take care of your father. He embraced me and hugged me tenderly for a while, and both of us were crying.

I said, "Mama sends you her kisses and her good-bye in case we cannot come anymore."

At the door I said very politely to the Ukrainian guard, "Thank you very much for allowing me to stay a long time with my father. I shall see you again very soon."

The paved road from Makyeyevka to Stalino first went downhill and without the heavy bag on my back I was able to walk fast even in those places where it was flat or uphill. I came to the school building where the Regional Conscription Labor Center was housed much ahead of the time that I had anticipated, but it was much later than my mother expected me from the concentration camp.

The first thing she said to me, "What happened? Why are you so late? I was afraid that something happened to you!"

"Well," I said, "first of all, Papa is in Makyeyevka in the hospital. Our red-haired friend from the Gestapo did exactly as he promised. Now, sit down, and I will tell you the whole story."

It took me a while to recount to her all the details of what had happened to me since I had left the morning before. I finished long after we had our supper and then my mother continued to ask me more to clarify some of the questions that were coming up in her mind. Finally, I told her, "We have to plan what we are going to do to help Papa now. Tonight or tomorrow morning we have to tell the *Lagerfuhrer* how things are and ask him to allow us to go to Makyeyevka."

But we didn't have to wait until the next day because the *Lagerfuhrer* called us to his office. As we were walking in the hall, my mother said, "Since he got involved in helping us, he follows up our progress and expects us to report to him everything that happens. He is curious to find out about your visit to your father."

I commented, "The human drama distracts him from the boring routine business of managing this Center."

"You are wrong, he really wants to help us. Otherwise he wouldn't get himself involved. He is a good man," replied my mother.

Indeed, my mother was right. After I told the *Lagerfuhrer* all the details about how his red-haired friend from the Gestapo had organized everything to send my father to the hospital, he was sincerely happy. He said, "Hans is a very good person and a loyal

friend. Tomorrow I shall congratulate him on the job well done."

I said, "Tell him that we will never forget his good deed and there are no words that can express our gratitude."

I told *Lagerfuhrer* that my father was in very bad health and would need to be fed every day with nutritious food to be able to stand on his feet again.

My mother took this opportunity to ask him, "Could you give us permission, one at a time, to visit my husband, so we could go to the market and sell our things or barter them for food?"

*Lagerfuhrer* thought for a while and said, "You have to consider seriously what I told you before, that if the convoy train arrives one of you would go to Germany and the other could remain here with your husband or father."

My mother replied, "My husband is in such bad health that we should take this risk because without our help he will not survive. Please write me a pass for tomorrow morning. I will go there and speak with the doctor about providing the care he needs. I will take something with me to barter for food on the market."

*Lagerfuhrer* looked at me and asked, "Do you agree with your mother?"

"Yes," I replied affirmatively, "we already have discussed it and there is no other way. We agreed to let our destiny decide what shall happen to us. If our destiny is to go to Germany together, we shall do everything possible to do it. But if one of us has to remain here and take care of my father, so be it."

"Very well," replied *Lagerfuhrer*, "come tomorrow morning to the office to get your pass." We thanked him and wished him good night.

"Good night and good luck!" he wished us.

When the next morning my mother went to get the herb tea in the cafeteria, the cook told her that *Lagerfuhrer* wanted to see her. She returned to the room all worried and told me, "Get up, there must be some problem, *Lagerfuhrer* wants to see me." As we were waiting for him in the corridor near his office, we were guessing that it might be that he received news that the convoy train was coming.

But it was a wrong guess. When he came, he told us that there were some problems with the transport and that the convoy train would be delayed for at least a week, maybe more. Therefore, he decided to give both of us a pass to go to Makyeyevka and take care of my father. In the pass he wrote that my mother and I were temporarily released from the Regional Conscripted Labor Center in the town of Stalino because of serious illness of husband and father, who was in the hospital in Makyeyevka, and that we were under an obligation to return to the Center as soon as his condition was improved.

"Could we take some of our luggage with us?" asked my mother timidly.

"You shall take your entire luggage with you," he replied. "You understand that the situation may change any time and, if the convoy train shall arrive sooner, you may miss your opportunity to go to Germany because this would be the last train to Germany from Stalino." And he asked again, "Do you want to take this risk?"

"Yes," we answered together.

Then *Lagerfuhrer* told us, "Go and ask the janitor where the man who has a horse lives. He occasionally does some chores for the center. As soon as you have secured transportation, you may leave."

"Thank you, *Herr Lagerfuhrer*, you are a very kind man," said my mother with tears

in her eyes.

"*Danke, danke schön*," I said.

We found the janitor and he gave us the address of the man who had a horse. He suggested, "Tell him that it is for the Center, but that you will pay him anyway. Then he can't refuse it."

My mother had sent me to pack our things and told me to make a good package of soap and to take it to *Lagerfuhrer's* office. And she went in town to look for the man with the horse.

Our roommates saw me packing in a hurry and anxiously asked me what happened. "Have you found out that the Germans are ready to deport us?"

"No, no. Don't worry," I said calmly. "We are going to see my father again, he is in the hospital. We will stay this time for several days. *Lagerfuhrer* does not want us to leave our things here."

"Aren't you lucky," said one of them with envy.

"How could we be lucky when my father is dying?" I screamed at her.

"Oh, I didn't know that it was so bad. I am sorry," she retracted her comments.

And the other one commented, "That's why you were allowed all this time to go out to visit him. We thought you were bribing the *Lagerfuhrer*, or that you had some connections."

"No, we simply have a paper stating that my father is very sick." And my roommates left me in peace to pack our belongings.

After I finished, I went to see my friend Sasha Boyko and told her the news about our departure. She became upset, fearing that we would not return on time and that she would be going to Germany alone without me. I gave her the address of Zoya Litvinova and told her to send her letters for me. This calmed her down.

My mother returned with the man and a two-wheel cart pulled by the skinny horse. The man carried all our luggage to the cart, which was small, and our luggage filled it up to the top.

Sasha Boyko embraced and kissed us saying, "Return soon so we can depart to Germany together."

*Lagerfuhrer* got out and shook our hands, and wished us good luck. We said to him, "Thank you very much for your help. *Auf Wiedersehen!*" We climbed on the cart and sat next to the coachman. As the cart moved, we waved to them and repeated again, "*Auf Wiedersehen!*" We departed from the Regional Conscripted Labor Center not knowing what destiny had in store for us.

The skinny horse moved very slowly; only in the early afternoon we arrived in Makyeyevka. My mother told the coachman to drive to the hospital. Right away I went to the room where my father was and quickly told him through the open door that we came to take care of him. Meanwhile, my mother asked the hospital employees where we could find a room to stay not too far from the hospital. Someone gave her an address and the coachman took us there.

A woman gave us a separate room with the use of her kitchen, but she didn't want to be paid in *Deutschemarks*; however, she agreed to be compensated with food from the market.

The coachman carried our luggage into the room and accepted to be paid for his services with German money and even took us back to the hospital.

Right away my mother went to see the woman doctor who was in charge; she wanted to find out what needed to be done to put my father on his feet. She discussed the arrangements with her about compensation for the special care that she would give him. The woman doctor was very kind and explained that, unless some unexpected complications would arise, all that my father needed was good nutrition and rest. She told my mother to begin to feed him milk, cheese, eggs, sour cream, sugar, butter, a nutritious meat soup, and fruits. She warned her to increase the size and the number of meals slowly. In addition, she said that in the beginning he needed some walking in the hall, but later, as he gained strength, he would need to walk in the garden to restore his muscle tone. She was not specific about her compensation, but told my mother that she preferred to be paid in food, rather than with German money.

Then we went to see my father and showed the Ukrainian guard our passes from the *Lagerfuhrer* written in German. From the way he looked at the passes, we understood that he was not able to read German, but he didn't ask us to explain what they meant. And we didn't volunteer to give him any details. I saw that the passes gave him the impression that they were important documents issued by the German authorities with the German seal, and it was enough for him to assume that we were there with the permission of the Gestapo.

My mother didn't lose time and told the Ukrainian guard the details about the doctor's treatment regimen, which required us to be with the patient almost all day and to take care of him. Then, in a businesslike manner my mother asked the guard, "How many *Deutschemarks* should we pay you each day to stay with my husband?"

He looked at her with surprise and we saw from the movement of his lips and from the counting on his fingers that he was calculating silently how many hours it could be. Then he told my mother an estimate that seemed right for him. My mother agreed without bargaining but gave him for today only a portion of it for the few hours that remained until the curfew. He seemed to be satisfied.

It was a painfully joyous reunion with my father. We fed him well that afternoon and retrieved some winter items from the bag that I had brought to him on Wednesday. The other prisoner who was in the room before had already gone back to the concentration camp, and the guard went somewhere to see other prisoners; this left us free to talk with my father. Everything seemed to fall into place, as if by a design of the invisible hand of destiny. It was hard to believe that it was all happening just by chance alone.

During the days that followed, we stayed with my father every day almost all day long. The Ukrainian guard was paid generously and he got used to us and was disappearing for hours leaving us alone. My father told us what happened to him on July 2, 1943 at the Soap Factory he managed when he was arrested by the Gestapo. He suspected that the Master of the factory, who dreamed to become a manager himself, found a very good opportunity to get rid of him. He was the only one who could have reported to Gestapo the exact time when he was distributing the soap to the workers—the evidence that he was pilfering the soap produced for the Germans.

He was kept in the Gestapo cellar in Slavyansk without any explanation until July 9 when, early in the morning before dawn, all the prisoners were ordered to climb in a hurry on Gestapo trucks and transported to Gestapo Headquarters in Stalino, a trip of about 150 kilometers that was made in one day.

On July 18, after nine days of encarceration in the Gestapo cellar in Stalino, during which they took only his identity data, he was moved with other prisoners by truck to the Gestapo concentration camp located near Makyeyevka. There the prisoners lived in the large dug-out holes covered with earth roofs and worked in the fields all day long. His health deteriorated rapidly for the lack of food, he became all swollen and could barely walk. He feared that soon he would be shot by the Lagerfuhrer who did this routinely in the fields with the prisoners who couldn't work.

When in the middle of August my mother and I came to visit him, he had no hope to survive for long and was happy that he could say the last good-bye to us. Then a week later when I came to visit and gave him the instructions for the next week to sit near Medical barrack and wait when the red-haired German will come from Gestapo Headquarters in Stalino. I told that he promised to help him. "I had little hope," my father commented, "but I did exactly as she told me."

"On August 25, I was sitting near the door to the Medical barrack," continued my father, "when the young red-haired German arrived with the new Kommandant and right away pointed at me commenting about my health condition. I couldn't believe what was happening next. Kommandant ordered medical officer in charge to send me immediately to the hospital. I was ordered to climb on the horse cart and was transported here to Makyeyevka hospital where I was kept under the watch of the Ukrainian concentration camp guards."

When I arrived in the hospital with a big bag of winter clothing and food, my father wondered if his women were really thinking that he would survive that long. But when mother and I both arrived and told him that we were allowed by the Lagerfuhrer of the Center in Stalino to stay in Makyeyevka and to take care of him until his health is restored, my father said, "Thank God for the good Germans!"

During the days that followed, my mother bartered food at the market from peasant women in exchange for our linens, fabrics, clothes, and soap. She was able to find everything that was needed for my father, for the doctor, for the landlady, and for us. We fed my father as the doctor prescribed and made him walk in the hospital hall the first couple of days. His swelling had gone down and he was returning slowly to his normal lean body. The doctor told us that my father was strong enough to take walks in the hospital garden and notified the Ukrainian guards about it. Therefore, the guards got used to having us around all day and allowed my father to be out of his room during the day for longer walks in the garden.

## The Escape

By Olga Gladky Verro

My father was recuperating slowly from the pitiful condition he had been reduced to in a short time of internment in the Gestapo concentration camp. From the middle of August 1943 when he was transferred to a civilian hospital in Makyeyevka and placed under the eye of its Ukrainian guards my mother and I did nothing else but took care of

nourishing him back to health.

On the first day of September my mother came from the market with the news that the Red Army could be here any day now. The exodus of the civilians and the Germans had started. We began to plan how to help my father escape from the hospital. Using the excuse that my father needed to protect his head from the sun, we bought for him a cap with a visor to cover his short prisoner's haircut, and the Ukrainian guards got used to him wearing a hat when he was going for a long walk in the garden. Meanwhile, we found an opening in the hospital garden fence from which we could exit without being seen by anybody from the hospital. The Ukrainian guards were very worried because they had to retreat with the Germans, and they didn't bother too much to check on my father's whereabouts.

On the third of September, when we saw that the Germans were leaving town, my mother went to look for a driver with a horse to take us to Stalino. But she was out of luck, as nobody wanted to be on the road for fear that the Germans would take their horse and cart. We consulted with my father to see if he felt strong enough to walk about twelve kilometers to Stalino. He knew that we were running out of time and that there was no alternative, and he promised to do his best.

My mother and I went quickly to our room and selected all winter clothing for the three of us, a few pieces of linen, off-white silk cut, and blue wool cut that was purchased for my father's suit. My mother thought the fabrics would be good bartering items. We stuffed it all in three pillowcases, which we used to make knapsacks. Then we took our cotton stockings and made shoulder straps with them by tying one end to the top and the other end to the opposite bottom corners of the pillowcases. This way we could carry them on our backs. We filled one market bag with food and took one piece of soap for each of us. We also made two bundles with the winter coats and boots. We both agreed that we couldn't carry more than that and decided to leave in the room what we could not take with us for our landlady.

In a hurry we went to the hospital and as usual we gave my father his nutritious lunch and we ate our sandwiches. The Ukrainian guard was not in the hall and we walked out and into the garden and then quickly through the opening in the brick fence and to our landlady's apartment. In our room we helped each other to put on our makeshift knapsacks, took the bags with the food and bundles with the winter coats, and walked out of the room telling the astonished landlady, "Good-bye. We are leaving. All our things that remain are for you."

We walked briskly through the streets leading toward the road to Stalino. As we came to the main road we saw that there were many others walking in that direction, some pulling carts with their luggage, some, like us, carrying bags, knapsacks, and other types of luggage. The people walked on the side of the road leaving the road free because once in a while motorcycles or military vehicles with German soldiers drove by at a high speed—all in the direction of Stalino. My father was becoming visibly tired, but he didn't complain.

I decided to try to ask for a ride from one of the Germans driving by. At some point I heard the sound of a truck behind us and I stopped and raised my hand. It was an old truck carrying only three men in the back and two German soldiers in the cabin. There was plenty of space and they easily could have given us a ride. But they just passed by, paying no attention to us.

We continued to walk, now slower because we were almost sure that the Ukrainian guards would not chase us. Then we saw that the truck that had just passed by was pulled off the road with the hood open and the German soldiers were trying to repair something inside. As we walked by we saluted them in German, but they were too busy to pay attention to us. After a few minutes I heard the sound of motor vehicle coming behind us. I stopped raising my hand to ask for a ride. I was out of luck; it was the same truck and it didn't stop. But we waved our hands, as if we were saying good-bye. And we continued to walk. Once in a while I tried to get a ride from other military vehicles, but they could not help us even if they wanted—there was no room in them.

Suddenly on the straight stretch of road we could see the familiar truck parked on the road and the Germans repairing it. As we came close, we saluted them again, as if they were our good friends sharing the road with us. This time one of the Germans asked us if we were going to Stalino. "Ya, ya," I answered.

He said to the other soldier, "Let's give them a ride; maybe it will bring us luck with the truck!" The other soldier agreed, and they told us to climb in the back of the truck. The three men already on the truck were civilians and we saluted them in Russian.

I saw that my father was apprehensive scared, and he went right away to the other side of the truck. We followed him. He whispered to my mother and me, "Their haircut is like those worn by the prisoners at the Gestapo concentration camp; I hope they don't recognize me. We had better keep on this side of the truck and not talk to them." The prisoners understood that we didn't want to socialize with them and didn't bother us. The Germans repaired the truck and it was running smoothly but slowly.

It was a cloudy day and when we drew closer to the town of Stalino, it began to drizzle. The truck was driving through the streets of the town and we were wondering where the Germans were going. Suddenly it stopped near a guarded gate and after the German guard checked their identity he allowed the truck to enter into a large courtyard. I saw my father become pale and with terror in his eyes he whispered, "This is the Gestapo Headquarters... I was here nine days in the cellar." And he indicated with his head the side of the building where he had been.

The German who drove the truck told us to get down and we jumped out into the courtyard. We were unsure what we should do now, but my mother found the strength to say, "*Danke schön!*" And I followed her in thanking him too. The German led us to the gate and told the guard to let us out. He explained to him that they had problems with the truck and he gave us a ride hoping that his good deed would bring him luck, and that indeed, the truck didn't stop on the road any more. And they both laughed at such a coincidence.

We walked out on the street and all together made a sigh of relief. The drizzle continued. My mother told us that now we were rested and could walk a little bit faster to the Regional Conscripted Labor Center. As we walked across the railroad tracks, we saw that there was a long train of locked freight cars standing on the tracks. There was no locomotive and I said, "Maybe the convoy train to Germany has arrived." But my mother dismissed my guess and told us to hurry.

As we arrived at the school building, the door was locked and there was no guard. We had to knock for a while until the janitor arrived and recognized us.

"What happened?" asked my mother. "Are we late? Has the convoy train to Germany departed?"

"It is standing on the railroad tracks and everybody is in the cars waiting from this morning for the locomotive to arrive. You better hurry if you don't want to miss it." We panicked and, almost running, returned to the train. We walked to about the middle of the train and sat under one of the freight cars to protect us from the drizzling rain. We decided to wait until some Germans arrived, hoping that they would allow us to board the train if we showed them our passes from the *Lagerfuhrer*. After all, the passes stated that we were under obligation to return to the Regional Conscripted Labor Center when my father was cured.

We waited for more than one hour and could hear the people talking in the car. Finally we saw a small group of Germans coming along the train and we got out from under the car and stood waiting for them to come closer. One of the soldiers saw us and ran toward us screaming, "*Heraus!*"<sup>1</sup> The other soldier followed him also screaming, "*Heraus!*"

I was holding our passes high in my hand and we didn't move. Suddenly we heard one of the officers calling back the soldiers and, as he was coming closer to us, we recognized that it was the *Lagerfuhrer*. He looked at us and said with disbelief in his voice, "*Frau Gladky!? Frauline Gladky!?*" And he greeted us warmly shaking our hands, as his good friends, and said, "You made it, barely on time, but you made it! What a lucky coincidence!" Looking at our makeshift knapsacks he asked, "Where is all your luggage that you had before?"

"We had to leave it all in Makyeyevka because we couldn't find anybody to drive us back," my mother replied.

"What a shame!" he said sympathetically shaking his head as if he couldn't conceive that we had lost all of our last possessions. But then he added as if he were consoling us, "But you accomplished your goal, you saved your husband and father!"

"Thanks to your help," I said.

"We are so grateful for all you did for us," my mother added emphatically.

*Lagerfuhrer* knew very well that my father was in the hospital as a prisoner of the Gestapo concentration camp, but he didn't ask us anything about how we succeeded in having him come with us. He definitely suspected that my father had escaped from the hospital, but it was obvious that he was glad for us. He ordered the soldier to open the car door and told him to help us with our luggage. Then he shook our hands and wished us a good journey. And we thanked him again and saluted him. We climbed into the car, while the German soldiers and the people in the car watched with curiosity. The soldier closed the door and we heard how he locked it.

We found some space in the middle of the car and sat on the floor, which was covered with a thick layer of straw. Soon we felt the jolt of the locomotive being attached to the train and heard a few German commands. Then the train slowly began to move. Some young people in the car made sad comments about the departure. I sighed with relief that everything, like magic, had come to a happy conclusion. No matter what was waiting for us ahead, the most important thing was that we were together again, my father, my mother, and me.

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1. "Out!" [in German].



## **Part Eight**

**1943-1945  
In Germany**



# Journey Toward the Unknown

By Olga Gladky Verro

On the third of September 1943, my mother, father, and I were allowed to board the German convoy train<sup>1</sup> dispatched from the Regional Conscripted Labor Center in the town of Stalino.<sup>2</sup> It was a long freight train of about fifty or more cars. Each car was filled to capacity with forty to fifty people, mostly young girls and boys conscripted for work in Germany from the occupied *Donbass*<sup>3</sup> region. However, there were also many adult people who, like us, took this last opportunity to leave their homes and to escape from the advancing Red Army, from being enslaved again by the Soviet regime, from being deprived again of freedom by the Bolsheviks, and from being persecuted by the NKVD.

For the first three days while the train was traveling west across the Ukraine we were locked in the freight cars without receiving any food or water. However, there was no problem with food, because before departure each person had been given a small loaf of bread for the journey, and almost everyone had brought something to eat from home, a piece of lard, roasted sunflower or pumpkin seeds, dry bread, or boiled eggs.

The hardest part for those three days of being locked up with forty to fifty people, lying and sitting next to each other on the car floor covered with a thick layer of straw, was to improvise the most inconspicuous way of natural body elimination. There was a hole in the bottom corner of the car door probably carved by those who traveled in it before. Men had a definite advantage in that they could stand close to the door and empty their bladders, but women had to use their drinking cups or flasks, which they then emptied through that hole in the door. Those who could not bear to hold their bowel movement had to endure the humiliation of evacuating on the straw right where they were sitting, wrapping it in the straw, and taking it to the door where they pushed it outside through the hole in the door with their hands.

After the first three days of keeping the car doors locked, the escorting Germans made the first stop in the western part of the Ukraine at a wide, recently harvested field; as far as the horizon one could see only new-grown weeds, so no one could hide or even think of escaping. German soldiers opened the doors of several cars at the same time and screamed, "*Heraus! Heraus! Heraus!*"<sup>4</sup>

Several hundred young men and women jumped out of the cars in the middle of the open field. It resembled a herd of wild animals running in all directions. But being humans they were running far from the train trying to find some privacy in the distance. Many could not run too far. There was not much one could do about it. After three days of being locked up the natural need was stronger than any sense of shame or modesty. This sorry spectacle was ridiculous to watch from the train, but it was painful for those who were running.

When the three of us, my mother, father and I, jumped out of the car, I looked at my father and asked, "What I should do?"

"Run and find a place behind somebody," he suggested. "You probably will never

see that person again..."

I made a short run and turned my back to some woman who was busy pulling down her knickers. I could see a few steps ahead of me a big naked behind... but there was no time to watch anyone. All had to be done in a hurry—the whistles of the escorting German soldiers reminded us to return to the cars, "*Schnell! Schnell!*"<sup>5</sup> They hurried us by making signs with their arms to return to the cars. My father estimated that there were more than two thousand five hundred people who had to be let out. From then on, for the remainder of the trip the convoy train would stop once a day at designated open and deserted fields, allow the people to get out for a short run, and then come to the train again. The fields were left behind well fertilized.

When the convoy train had reached the former Polish territory that was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939, once a day the train would also stop in the large stations and the doors of the cars would be partially opened and auxiliary personnel would distribute a small piece of dark bread to each person. Also, the soldiers would permit several persons from each car to get out on the platform and get water for those who passed them some kind of a container.

One early morning, when all were still asleep, the German soldiers opened the doors of our car wide. A wave of humid cold air and the screams of the Germans, "*Heraus! Heraus!*" made everybody jump to their feet. There was some confusion; all were trying to collect their luggage, to put on warm clothing, and to stay close to their friends, or even to the casual acquaintances made during the trip.

My father, mother, and I stayed close together. After my mother checked that we collected all our bags, we moved toward the car door. My father jumped out of the car first, my mother and I passed him our bags, and then we also jumped on the railroad track bed. The German soldiers gave a command to form a column near each car and we had to wait until all cars were empty. This long column along the convoy train resembled a huge, nervously convulsing snake as the people shivered, moved their bodies and arms, and stamped their feet, trying to warm-up standing in one place.

The gray sky of the early morning was an unfriendly greeting for the newly arrived conscripted young men and women. It was cold. A light rain was drizzling, but the deep mud indicated that it had rained hard before. Our feet were sinking into the mud, and water was seeping into our shoes. We had waited and waited stamping our feet. We were shivering because our clothing became damp and was not keeping us warm.

Word of mouth brought the news that it was the border between the former Polish territory annexed by the Soviet Union and the territory annexed by the Germany. Somebody said that the name of the place was Peremyshl.<sup>6</sup>

After a while we could see far ahead to front of the column a high wall and a large compound behind it. We could also see a group of German soldiers standing there and some civilians walking by. Finally, some high-ranking officer arrived. He, as we found out later, was the *Kommandant* of the processing center located behind the wall. With him was an entourage of more than two dozen soldiers.

The *Kommandant* ordered the soldiers to count the conscripted workers in the column. After all were counted, the *Kommandant* ordered to count all over again. It appeared that the count was not turning out right—some were missing. The news ran through the column quickly, "Some were able to escape! They managed it!"

The *Kommandant* and our escorting German officer gesticulated for a while,

pointing to the papers in their hands and to the people standing in the column and, finally, they saluted each other and the new escorts took over the command.

The gray mass of men and women standing in the column was patiently enduring it all, the German commands, the drizzle, the mud, and the cold. They had lost their personal identity and the right to voice their discontent from the day when they were conscripted for work by the German *Arbeitsamt* in their district, hometown, or village and placed on the convoy train.

Finally the *Kommandant* at the head of the column gave some commands and the column began slowly to move toward the large complex of buildings fenced with the high wall. Once in a while the column would stop for a short time and then it would resume its slow pace again.

My father, mother, and I were somewhere near the middle of the column. By this time the drizzle had stopped, but our feet were wet and our shoes were completely covered with mud. We were tired from keeping the bags on our backs all this time because we couldn't put them down in the mud. I complained of being tired and my father consoled me, "After all, maybe slowly, but we are moving forward." A few civilians had passed by without even looking at us, as if this procession of people was an everyday event and they were used to it.

Finally, we entered a large courtyard with several old buildings. My father said, "Ah! The name Peremyshl sounds very familiar. I think it is an old Polish military fortress."

On one side there were long buildings that looked like military barracks and on the other side there was one large building. The news came quickly through the column, "It is the processing center for those who enter the German territory, civilians and military alike."

From the moment we entered the courtyard everything was so well organized and was proceeding so smoothly and orderly that one had to take "one's hat off" to the Germans for their efficiency. The German guards immediately divided the conscripted into two groups—men and women. My father was directed to join the group of men standing near the barracks. And my mother and I were directed to join the group of women who were standing closer to the large building.

We saw that some women were already entering the large doors of the building. We were surprised that the Germans had showed their respect to women by leading us for the processing first, while men had to wait their turn outside the building.

Inside the processing building it was warm, which raised our spirits right away. In the large hall there were several German women attendants who knew a few Ukrainian words to convey the commands to us. We were ordered to remove all food from our luggage and to throw it away in the big metal barrels because our belongings would be disinfected and the food would be poisoned.

As soon as our luggage was cleared of food, a big wire basket was given to each of us and we were told to put our luggage in it. We were directed in groups of ten to move to the other side of the wire mesh wall dividing the hall. There were other women attendants who told us to undress and put our clothing in the same wire baskets together with the rest of our luggage for disinfection.

All naked, the women were directed to take the wire baskets to the counter, where the attendants tied a numbered metal token to it and gave another token with the

matching number attached to a cord to put around the person's neck as a pendant. As the attendants were placing the wire baskets on the metal racks, they were telling the anxious naked women that their luggage and clothing would be rolled into the disinfection chamber and that it would be waiting for them when they were ready to dress after taking a shower.

Reassured of the safety of their belongings, women commented on being pleased to have a warm shower. No wonder—after being locked up for more than a week in the freight car and sleeping dressed in a heavy clothing on the floor covered with straw, and after standing this morning in the cold mud—the warm shower seemed to be a gift from heaven.

"As for the start," someone remarked, "it's not bad. The Germans are treating us well!"

Someone else confirmed, "Right! So far so good!"

While everybody was standing naked waiting to get into the shower room, there was nothing else to look at, but the naked walls and the naked female bodies. I noticed that there was an amazing variety of sizes and shapes that had been created by the nature. Some were skinny - the others were fat; some had flat abdomens - the others had big bulging bellies, hanging folds of skin, or rolls of fat; some had small firm breasts - the others had breasts hanging lifeless on the chest; some had straight and well proportioned legs - the others had bowed or fat legs; some had hips and buttocks that were firm and smooth, as if they were sculpted by an artist - the others were badly deformed, fat, limp, or flabby. I saw how painful it was for those young women whose bodies were misshapen by the nature to be seen naked. And at that time I was glad that my mother was slender and looked good compared to the bodies of some girls. I felt great having a young and well-proportioned body.

For those women who were used to going to the beach in the summer it was not new to be naked and to see all kinds and shapes of naked women sunbathing or swimming.<sup>7</sup> But for the bashful peasant girls it was a traumatic experience. They were trying to hide themselves behind the others or in the corners of the room by turning their backs.

The bath attendant opened the door and we entered the steamy shower room, which was military style; there were no stalls and we had to stay close to each other and share the showerheads. On narrow indentations in the wall we found pieces of a dark and awful smelling disinfectant soap, which we had to use in bathing and in washing our hair. But the nice feeling of hot water running from the shower and caressing our faces and bodies for a few minutes give us such relaxing physical pleasure that it made us forget everything else.

The shower time was short; all was calculated to the last second by the efficient Germans. The door on the other side of the shower room opened and a German attendant screamed, "*Heraus! Heraus!*" ordering us to get out of the shower quickly. We understood that shower time was limited because there were many others behind us waiting to get in.

We entered a large waiting room with long wooden benches placed against the four walls. We expected to find something to dry ourselves with, but there was nothing there; however, it was warm and we had to accept the alternative of being air-dried.

The naked women were sitting close to each other. There was no more room left

on the benches to sit and the newly arrived had to stand near the door. The women sitting on the benches stared at our naked bodies. They giggled watching those who were bashful when they were making a run to the corners of the room to hide. Those of us who remained standing near the door clumped together as if being in a group provided us anonymity. The room was warm and our bodies dried out quickly but our hair was still wet.

German precision in scheduling the processing of this mass of human beings was amazing. Shortly after our arrival in the waiting room the door at the other end opened and a German man wearing a short white coat over his military uniform entered the room. He began to count by pointing his finger at the naked women sitting close to that door, and by waving his hand he directed them to exit, "*Ein, zwei, drei... sieben... zehn.*"<sup>8</sup>

As places on the bench became empty some of the women standing at the door attempted to make a run to sit there. But those sitting on the next bench prevented it by quickly getting up and moving there without losing their sitting order. Then the others who came later moved to the empty bench near the entry door.

My mother and I accommodated ourselves on the bench and waited our turn. For some unknown reason the nakedness of bodies prevented all of us from speaking in a normal tone of voice and when someone wanted to say something, she whispered it. It seemed that everyone knew that talking aloud would attract the attention of all, and everybody would immediately stare at them. Silence provided safety from the exposure of one's body to the scrutiny of the many prying eyes.

When the women from the shower room were entering, we could not keep ourselves from giggling at their reaction to being observed, as the others had laughed before at us. But not all was funny. I still remember one young peasant girl from a small village that was in our freight car during the trip. She had told somebody that it was the first time she had traveled on a train and that she was scared of everything new that was happening to her.

When she appeared naked at the opened door and all heads turned toward her, she emitted a sound like a mortally wounded wild animal and instinctively placed her left arm across her voluminous breasts and covered her pubic hair with the right hand. Bashfully she pulled her shoulders close to her head and tried to hide her face between her breasts. Then she helplessly descended on the floor right in the middle of the door and sat there in a squatted position. Everyone in the room exploded in a loud, uncontrollable laughter.

At first it seemed indeed a very funny scene. But as the laughter subsided, many women felt uneasy. It seemed that not everybody had lost their sensitivity to the pain of the others, and from the expression on the faces it was obvious that many were regretting the spontaneous outburst of laughter. Two women went toward the poor girl and helped her get up. They led her to one corner of the room where she could hide her nakedness better.

Soon after this incident my mother and I were counted by the German in the white coat and directed to exit down a long narrow hall. The attendant made signs with his hands showing us to go ahead toward the door at the other end of the hall. Ten of us were walking naked one after another in line and keeping ourselves close to the wall and close to each other as if it somehow helped to make our nakedness less visible.

We entered a very large room with many windows. It seemed larger than it really was because it was empty in the middle. All along the walls at some distance from each other were small tables and one chair near each. Men in white coats worn over German uniforms were examining the naked women who had entered before us. My mother whispered to me, "Medical examination." I nodded in agreement with her.

For a while we had to stay in line at the first table where the German in a military uniform without the white coat was able to speak some Russian. He was checking the names on the long list delivered by the escorting officer. After that he wrote on the medical examination form the name, sex, birthday, and the place of birth and then handed the paper to each woman.

When our turn came, he was not able to find our names on the list; I had to explain to him in German that the *Lagerfuhrer* of the Regional Conscripted Labor Center in Stalino put the three of us on the train at the last moment before its departure. Without much fuss, he added our names at the end of the list, including my father's name. Then he filled out our medical examination forms and told us to move on to the next table.

My mother and I got in line to wait our turn. As we were standing there naked, we were, of course, curious to see what was going on in the room and to find out what we could expect to happen to us next.

Although there was a chair near each table, all doctors stood to examine the naked women, who were also standing in front of them; then they wrote something on the examination form. The first doctor examined each woman very thoroughly by listening to the lungs and heart with a stethoscope. The second checked the throat, ears, and nose. The third examined the eyes. The fourth examined the skin on the hands, under the armpits, behind the ears, the scalp, and the rest of the body. The fifth ordered the woman to turn her back to him and his helper pushed her shoulders down to a horizontal position and held them from moving, allowing the doctor to examine quickly all the private parts.

After this undignified experience the woman was directed to the last tormentor, who was standing far apart from the rest of the examiners. He had a mask covering his nose and mouth and he had a metal cylindrical pump in his hands. As soon as the woman approached him, he quickly placed the pump close to her pubic area and pumped four times, "Puff-puff, puff-puff." A cloud of white disinfectant powder passed between the woman's legs and exited from the bottom of her buttocks in a long white foggy trail. Then he gave one short "puff" under each armpit, and the last "puff" he reserved for the scalp where the white powder adhered to the hair that was still slightly damp after the shower. As the woman was trying to blow and fan out the powder from her face, another attendant standing near the door would hurry her toward the exit.

After having undergone this humiliating procedure the women were leaving the examination hall with heavy hearts and with tears in their eyes, feeling robbed of their dignity. The only consolation was that this was the end of the ordeal that each had to endure. My mother and I resigned ourselves and endured this medical examination procedure like everybody else.

We exited with the other naked women into another hall leading finally to a room where our disinfected clothing and luggage were waiting. A strong smell of disinfectant filled the room, but no one paid any attention to it. The toilets were the place where

most women ran first and then hurried up to the counter where the wire baskets were distributed. All were in such haste to put on their still warm clothing that they didn't even think to complain that it smelled terrible. Suddenly those poor rags became so dear to all!

After being dressed, the women were directed toward the exit door, where German women were giving each person the day's ration, one quarter of a loaf of dark bread and one ladle of watery soup. There were several wooden benches on which one could sit and eat the food. However, all had to be done quickly, because a German soldier was hurrying everybody to exit to the courtyard. There was barely enough time to wash out the flasks or other containers and to fill them with drinking water from the faucet.

My mother and I came out of the processing center shortly before noon. There were no more women in the courtyard waiting for processing and some men, including my father had already been taken inside. Near the door there were two German soldiers who were directing the women coming out of the building to form a column. They gestured to my mother and me to join the others.

When there was a group of about forty women, the soldiers gave the order to march toward the gate, where an empty truck was waiting. We pushed our luggage onto the truck and then climbed on. Only then we saw that outside the gate there were German soldiers guarding a couple of other trucks already full of women who had returned before us. The truck smelled strongly of disinfectant. I commented to my mother, "The Germans want to be sure that no germs are brought into their country."

The soldiers didn't lock the back of the trucks and allowed some women to sit on the edge with their legs hanging down. When all the trucks were loaded, one German in uniform and with a gun across his shoulder climbed aboard each truck; then we heard a whistle and the trucks moved onto the road.

At that time of year it was cold riding in the open trucks and Mother and I sat against the side of the truck to shield us from the wind. Only occasionally did we lift our heads to look around.

It was only a short ride to the local railroad station with a large railroad yard. My father told me later that probably there the wide railroad tracks, standard to the Soviet territory, changed to the narrower European width tracks. The German soldiers ordered the women from one truck at a time to get down and to climb in the freight car of the new convoy train waiting for us. We were pleasantly surprised to find that these cars were clean with a fresh layer of straw on the floor and a large pail in the corner for excretions. The heavy disinfectant smell was nauseating.

"The Germans want to be sure," I commented again, "that no germs, lice, fleas, or bedbugs contaminate the cars and get imported to their country."

As soon as the cars were full, the soldiers locked the doors. We had to sit and wait the rest of the afternoon until all women and men were processed, loaded on the trucks, and transferred to the new convoy train. As they came out of the processing center, the men were loaded together into cars and we were separated from our father. When all were accounted for, the locomotive was attached and the convoy train began the second half of the journey.

From then on, the convoy train traveled at a faster speed. Once a day in the large stations each person in the car received a small piece of dark bread and a ladle of

watery soup and we were allowed to fill our containers with water. It was hard for us to recognize when the train reached the German territory because the names of the stations in Poland had been changed to German names.

One evening the train stopped in a large station and the Germans allowed a few people from each car to get the water for everybody. There was another convoy train standing on the next track. The freight cars had small windows covered with barbwire and the doors were securely locked. In the dim light from the railroad platform penetrating through the spaces between the cars we could see in those cars only occasional faces and military hats of the men as they climbed up to peek out through their windows.

"Prisoners? Maybe ours," someone in our car guessed.

"Are you prisoners?" somebody asked. There was no answer.

Someone asked the same in German, "*Gefangene?*" Again, no answer.

Finally my mother asked them in French, "*Prisogne de la guerre?*"

The answer followed promptly, "*Si, si. Siamo prigionieri di guerra. Siamo Italiani.*" And my mother guessed, "Yes, yes. We are war prisoners. We are Italians."

"They are Italian prisoners of war," the word got around.

Someone outside our car who was bringing the water for us volunteered to bring it to the Italians as well and passed it through the barbwire in their window. Someone offered them a piece of bread. The Italians reciprocated with the cigarettes. I observed this camaraderie and thought, "People have not lost yet their solidarity; they have not yet lost human compassion."

The whistles of our German escort soldiers interrupted the camaraderie. A few good-byes were said to the Italian prisoners.

"Schnell! Schnell!" the barking of the German soldiers hurried all to return to their cars and all quickly obeyed. At that time no one could escape anymore. Where to? Our country was already far behind us. By now, probably most had accepted that it was better to continue the trip into the unknown.

After the cars were locked, for a while everybody was trying to settle in for the night on the floor. We were all tightly packed with more than forty people in the car plus bags and suitcases that everyone was keeping close to their body. After all, they contained our only possessions, some warm clothing to protect us from the cold weather that was approaching. We were lying so close to each other that it was hard even to straighten our legs.

I couldn't fall asleep due to the many sad thoughts that were overwhelming my mind. The deep sighs and the multi-toned snoring coming from one or the other part of the car were bothering me. And almost continuous crying, even in her sleep, of one sixteen-year-old girl was painfully unnerving. She was snatched from her family, from her home and was thrown in that car without knowing where she was going... Finally somebody barked at her, "Shut up!" and she stopped crying aloud for a while.

The heavy air full of the smell of human perspiration, smoke, excretions, and disinfectant was difficult to breathe. Once in a while I felt a kick by someone in her sleep, or maybe by someone awake who disregarded others and was thinking only about her own comfort. At the end, the rhythmic ticking of the train and the tiredness won and I fell asleep in an unbelievably awkward position.

We had been traveling more than a week—really, we had lost count. The train was

now stopping in the large stations where we would receive some kind of warm watery soup in the afternoon. Word of mouth brought the news that soon we would “arrive at our destination,” but no one knew exactly where.

Early in the afternoon on the twelfth of September, 1943 the convoy train stopped at the railroad yard of a very large station. The German guards opened the doors of the cars one at a time and ordered everybody to get out with their luggage and to form a column. Somebody said, “We have finally arrived!”

As soon as the small column was formed, the order was given to walk with one German guard at the head of the column and another one at its side. We had to walk for some time before we arrived at the huge distribution center for conscripted labor located on the outskirts of the city of Dresden.

The guard in a military uniform opened the gate and allowed the column into the large courtyard. The other guards counted the exact number of people and accompanied each group to the assigned barrack. Women and men were placed in separate barracks and Mother and I were not able to find my father that evening.

It was a typical German conscripted labor camp surrounded by barbwire. The low wooden barracks were equipped with two rows of wooden bunk beds placed in pairs next to each other against the long walls, with a narrow passage in the middle. The new burlap mattresses and pillows filled with fresh straw seemed to be a luxury after the ten days of sleeping on the freight car floor. There was a table with two wooden benches and a metal stove placed in the center of the barracks, but there was no wood to start a fire.

As our group of women entered the barracks, the guard had closed the door and we were left on our own to accommodate ourselves. The small windows were covered for blackout at night, as was customary during the war. Two electric bulbs of a very low wattage were hanging from the ceiling, making the room appear spooky until our eyes got used to it.

Some confusion followed. Everybody hurried to find a bunk of her personal preference and to mark it by placing her luggage on the mattress. Some liked it to be near the exit door or close to the stove; the others wanted it to be in the corner; some liked to sleep on the upper level, while others didn't like to climb and preferred to sleep on the lower; some were looking to find a place close to somebody they knew; the others were trying to be far from those they disliked. My mother and I selected the bunk bed at the very end of the barrack hoping to have more privacy there.

In the midst of this hustle and bustle a young man opened the door and announced in Russian, “Girls, grab some containers and follow me to the kitchen for a hot soup. Remember the number on the door of your barracks!” Everybody began to pull whatever containers they had in their luggage and the whole group hurried after the young man to the kitchen.

The German woman who distributed the soup was very careful to measure it with a ladle, as if it were a mortal sin to give one extra drop of it. There was no place to sit inside the kitchen distribution hall and the young man told us to go back to our barracks and eat there. He also told us to come to the kitchen early the next morning to have a cup of the ersatz coffee.

Back in our barracks we all sat either at the table or on the lower level bunk-beds and avidly ate “the soup.” It was a watery soup thickened with some flour and it had a

few pieces of turnips swimming in it, but it was hot, and, as it filled the stomach, it radiated a nice feeling of warmth inside the body. There were some girls who expressed their dislike of the boiled turnips, but most finished it without complaints. There was a faucet outside of our barracks and we washed our containers and filled them with water for the night.

Helped by the cloudy weather the evening darkness came very quickly. We hadn't seen my father since we got in the new convoy train, but my mother and I didn't have time to find my father that evening before the German guard locked our door. With what we had to endure on that long day all of us were tired and in no time everybody in our barracks was sound asleep.

Early in the morning the German guard unlocked the door and gave a wake-up call with a whistle. We had to stay in a long line to the outhouse and then we washed our faces outside under the faucet and went to the kitchen; there they filled our canteens with hot and bitter ersatz coffee. Since we had traveled the last part of the trip in separate cars, we decided that it was best to wait near the kitchen for my father to show up. Finally, we saw him.

My father had already heard that today the *Lagerfuhrer* would start interviewing all those who had arrived yesterday for the job placement. We agreed that all three of us should go there together with whoever of us was called first. This way we could plead not to be separated.

Like everywhere else, German organization was to be admired. We were told to stay in our barracks and wait our turn. The guard in uniform came and led all women from our barracks to the office of the *Lagerfuhrer* and we couldn't call my father. Once inside the office, we were divided by occupation groups. I declared my occupation as an electrician. Therefore, I was assigned to the group that would be placed for work in a factory.

They didn't know where to place my mother, who declared herself to be a teacher, and who was much older than the rest of the conscripted young women. However, when I was called for an interview with the *Lagerfuhrer*, my good knowledge of German was most helpful. I asked right away to admit my mother with me for the interview and between both of us we were able to negotiate with the *Lagerfuhrer* to be placed, all three of us, as a family to work in the same factory. Once more our knowledge of the German language helped us.

On our way out we were given several bright blue squares of fabric with the big white letters "OST" printed on them. We were told to secure them right away with safety pins on the front of our outer clothing in a very visible place and to be sure to have them on all the time. I asked what "OST" meant and what it was for. The explanation was short, "It means that you are an *Ostarbeiter*, which in German means 'worker from the east' and everybody should be able to see it." From that moment on, we were referred to by that name "*Ostarbeiter*." It served as identification for all purposes and on all occasions.

On the second day I saw Sasha Boyko in the morning as we were walking to the kitchen for the morning ersatz coffee. It was a joyous reunion, especially for Sasha, who thought we had remained in Makyeyevka to take care of my father. She was clinging to me as if I were her older sister. She said, "I hope they would send me to work in the same place with you." I could understand her loneliness and apprehension to be

separated from me, but we couldn't choose where we would be sent to work. Therefore, I told her to keep Zoya's Litvinova address and, wherever she would be sent, she should write me at her address and Zoya would send it to me.

We stayed in that camp for two weeks waiting for a placement. During this time we met the Styepanov family, husband, wife, and a small girl Yulia. My father and mother had many things in common with Styepanovs and shared with them their hopes and dreams for the future after the end of war.

Living in this camp we had a good preview of what we could expect for the duration of the war living in the German *Ostarbaitern* camp. As we observed some of the *Ostarbaitern* who were permanently living there and working somewhere in town, my parents and I discussed the pros and cons of what we could expect in the near future. We saw that the *Ostarbeitern* in that camp were not free to go outside the fence by themselves and that they were going to work and returning back in columns of four under the supervision of an old German guard with a gun across his shoulder.

"Most of the young girls and boys were conscripted to work here," reasoned my father. "They didn't come here voluntarily, as we, the Stepanovs, and some others did. The Germans don't want them to run away and have the country inundated with vagrant foreigners."

"Well," I said, "we certainly are not planning to escape. Therefore, the old guard should not bother us."

We also found out that the work day in the factories was twelve hours, from six o'clock to six o'clock on either the day or night shift, Monday through Saturday, and that the Germans were maintaining the Christian tradition of having Sunday as a day of rest.

"This is nothing new for us," I said. "It is the same schedule that we followed for two years of German occupation at home. If we could do it there, we should also be able to do it here without any problems."

We also realized that we would not be living together with my father as a family, but that he would stay in the barracks with the other men and my mother and I would stay with the women.

"We will be seeing each other every day," I said. "After having almost resigned ourselves of losing Papa forever, there is no reason to complain about such a small inconvenience."

We also expected to live in the standard wooden barracks and sleep on the bunk beds on the mattresses filled with straw.

"But we will have a roof over our heads and won't worry about running into the cellar to hide from the Soviet shrapnel shells," said my mother, remembering almost two years of indiscriminate shooting by the Soviet artillery on our town at any time of day or night.

We also found out during these two weeks what kind of food and how much of it we could expect to have every day, or once a week, and how it tasted. In the morning, we could have plenty of hot ersatz coffee or herbal tea. At twelve o'clock and in the evening there would be a watered-down soup thickened with flour and made with small quantities of some kind of vegetables, mostly turnips or spinach, tasting awful but healthful. In addition, in the evening we could expect a half of a small loaf of bread. We hoped that on Sunday it would be the same treat as we had received in this camp where in addition to the watered-down soup they gave us a tablespoon of sugar, two thin one-

inch squares of margarine, one slice of some kind of salami, and one boiled potato!

"Well," commented my father, "this is better than they were treating us prisoners in the Gestapo camp in Makyeyevka! On this diet we can survive here while waiting for the end of war."

After discussing all these details of what to expect in our near future, I concluded, "No matter how hard it will be, the most important thing is that the three of us are together again, that we are in Europe, far away from the Bolshevik scum, and that we don't have to fear the NKVD persecutions anymore."

"Thanks to those three good Germans," added my mother, "who helped us to find and save your father. Without their help your father would be dead either in the German Gestapo concentration camp, or in the Soviet NKVD concentration camp. Maybe only the two of us would be here."

And we reminisced about the events that had occurred during the last weeks at home in Slavyansk, in Stalino, and in Makyeyevka, and remembered with warm gratitude the three good Germans who by their benevolence to us had changed the course of our lives.

"May God bless them and help them to come home alive," said my father with humility.

We waited in the conscripted labor distribution camp in Dresden for more than two weeks until placement for work in a factory was found for my father and me. Sasha Boyko and I spent a lot of time together and promised to keep in touch for as long as we knew where each of us was located.

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1. Olga Gladky Verro, unpubl. memoirs, [in Italian], 1956, transl. by the author.

2. See the chapters "Leaving Our Home" and "The Escape."

3. Shortened name for the Donets Basin.

4. "Out! Out! Out!" [in German].

5. "Quick! Quick!" [in German].

6. Przemyśl [in Polish].

7. In the Soviet Union at that time many beaches were fenced and separate for men and for women who sunbathed naked on the sand.

8. "One, two, three... seven... ten." [in German].

## *Ostarbeitern* Camp in Oelsnitz

By Olga Gladky Verro

On the twenty-eighth of September, 1943 a placement agent from the *Arbeitsamt*<sup>1</sup> of Plauen<sup>2</sup> came to the conscripted workers distribution camp<sup>3</sup> in Dresden to escort the three of us, my father, my mother, and me, on the train to our place of work. The agent was a big man wearing a civilian black coat and large brimmed hat, and he had heavy, dark-frame glasses with thick lenses like magnifying glasses. He was glad my mother and I spoke and understood German. This was especially useful when we got on the train where everybody could see our origins by the "*OST*" insignia attached on

our coats. Being able to talk with him in German and answer the questions of the passengers with whom we were sharing the compartment dissipated their and our uneasiness. The passengers were especially interested in where we came from and wanted to find out from us, as eyewitnesses, where the front line was at that time.<sup>4</sup>

In a short time we arrived in the town of Plauen, where we had an interview with a placement agent in the *Arbeitsamt* office. He told us we would be placed at the factory in the nearby small town of Oelsnitz,<sup>5</sup> where I would work as an electrician and my father as a packer of parts for shipping; my mother would work in the camp's kitchen. We were very happy to hear that we would remain together. The first agent brought us to stay overnight in the *Ostarbeitern* camp in Plauen and in the morning he took us on the local train to the town of Oelsnitz.

It was a short trip. From the Oelsnitz station, we had to walk across the town to the *Ostarbeitern* camp. The placement agent was walking fast and we were trailing behind carrying all our belongings, our pillowcase bags on our backs, bundles with winter clothing, and large market bags with smaller items in our hands. The hardest part was the last stretch of the road that climbed to the top of the steep hill toward the two large buildings.

The placement agent brought us to the office of a *Lagerfuhrer*. They saluted each other, "*Heil Hitler!*"<sup>6</sup>

After that the agent presented us as the new *Ostarbeitern*, handed him our documents, and said, "They speak German well. They will be able to answer all your questions. You don't need me and I have to hurry to take the next train back home." Then he saluted him quickly, "*Heil Hitler!*" and us, "*Aufwiedersehen!*" and walked away.

The *Lagerfuhrer* interviewed us right away and after checking our papers assigned my mother to work in the kitchen. He told us that my father and I would go the next morning together with the other *Ostarbeitern* for work in the factory. He ordered a woman from the kitchen to call someone to come to his office immediately.

The short and thin young man hurriedly entered the office. The *Lagerfuhrer* presented him to us, "This is Lyonya,<sup>7</sup> the *Dolmetscher*."<sup>8</sup> He introduced the three of us as the Gladky family. Then he ordered Lyonya to show us where everything was in the camp; to inform the kitchen that my mother was assigned to work there; to explain to us the regulations for the *Ostarbeitern*; and to help us settle in the dormitory.

Lyonya started to interpret what the *Lagerfuhrer* said, but I interrupted him, "We understand German well and don't need the translation." The expression on his face showed that he didn't like this.

When Lyonya showed us the kitchen, which was located in the same building as the *Lagerfuhrer's* office, he introduced my mother to the German woman who was in charge of the kitchen. She told my mother to be there at six o'clock the next morning. Then he led us to another German woman who was in charge of dispensing work clothes and shoes. She gave us blue pants and shirts made of heavy cotton and laced work boots with thick wooden soles.

After that, with an air of importance, Lyonya informed us that he was the *Lagerfuhrer's* "right hand" in the *Ostarbeitern* camp; that he received orders from him and made sure that those orders and the established regulations were obeyed by everybody. He emphasized that if we had any problems, we should not disturb the *Lagerfuhrer*, but should come to see him and he would take care of it. He also told us

that he was in charge of distributing the bread and food rations.

As Lyonya was showing us the camp's facilities we asked him why this camp was different from what we expected after being in the camp in Dresden for two weeks and then in Plauen, where we lived in standard wooden barracks.

He told us, "This is a long story, but I will try to make it short. After the Heinkel<sup>9</sup> airplane factory in Berlin was bombed by the Americans, parts from the salvaged departments were transferred to various cities in Germany. All the people who worked there were also transferred. Here, to Oelsnitz, all German engineers, masters, and workers were moved, as well as foreign workers of all nationalities: Polish, Czechoslovakian, French, Greek, Russian, and Ukrainian."

With an air of competency, he explained, "Resumption of production of airplane parts was vital for the German *Luftwaffe*.<sup>10</sup> For this reason the transfer of equipment and people was done with speed and efficiency. Housing for the foreign workers had to be improvised quickly—there was no time to bother with the constructing the standard labor camp with wooden barracks. And German engineers, masters, and workers were placed to live with the local families."

When we were already outside of the building, Lyonya explained further, "And for all foreign workers they found this nice place to live." Lyonya stopped and stretched out his arms, then slowly turned around and exclaimed emphatically, as if he were inviting us to admire the view, "After living behind barbwire fence in Berlin, this is like living in paradise!"

We looked around and agreed with him; it was indeed a beautiful, picturesque sight. We were standing on a hill covered with green grass and all around were other green hills. Below was a full view of the small town of Oelsnitz.

On the hill there were two large buildings. Lyonya explained that the one from which we had just exited was a former hotel, and at a short distance from it was a former sports club gymnasium. These two buildings had been adapted to house all foreign workers. All workers from the European countries were placed in the former hotel. The *Ostarbeitern*—workers from the Soviet Union, Russians, Ukrainians, and other nationalities—were housed in the former sports club gymnasium building. The hotel's kitchen was divided in order to cook food separately for the *Ostarbeitern* and the privileged foreign workers, who ate in the dining hall; the *Ostarbeitern* had to take their food and eat either outside during good weather, or at tables inside their dormitory.

Probably because these buildings were somewhat isolated from the rest of the town and the open space around them made it possible to see anyone who was walking up or down the hill, barbwire fence had not been installed around them, but the grounds were supervised all day by a couple of old German guards; at night, the *Ostarbeitern* were locked inside their building.

Workers of European nationalities had the privilege of going into town any time of the day they wished and had a curfew in the evening that allowed them to go to the movies, to the bathhouse, or to visit with friends in the nearby villages. *Ostarbeitern* could have a pass from the *Lagerfuhrer*, on the weekdays only for a very special reason, such as to visit a doctor or dentist. To our surprise, we found out that on Sundays a limited number of *Ostarbeitern* could receive a pass for a short walk, or to visit somebody in the infirmary in town.

Notwithstanding these restrictions, not having a barbwire fence and having an

open space all around the buildings and freedom of movement on the grounds, as well as communication with workers of other nationalities living in the hotel building, were important liberties that made life less oppressive in that camp.

We were also very surprised to see the *Ostarbeitern* living quarters in the former sports club gymnasium. This place was very different from the standard barracks in a typical German labor camp. Lyonya explained to us that the gymnasium hall was formerly used for competitions in gymnastics, athletics, as well as other indoor sports. The sports fans from the nearby towns used to come here to watch the tournaments and games held in the gymnasium; some stayed overnight in the hotel and enjoyed meals in the hotel's dining hall.

The sports club gymnasium hall was a large, tall, brick building with wide double-door entrances on two sides; many wide windows placed close to the ceiling provided ample natural light. Inside the hall there were two large staircases leading from the doors to the spectators' balcony located on one end of the hall. On both ends there were locker rooms and well-equipped showers and bathrooms. The hall had a beautiful wooden parquet floor, now poorly maintained and showing signs of wear.

It was an ideal place to house a large number of people without much additional work because all the necessary facilities were already there. To house men and women, the hall was divided in half with a high brick wall up to the balcony's handrail and continued across the balcony. On both sides of the wall several rows of standard bunk beds had been placed in blocks of four units. The standard burlap mattresses and pillows filled with straw completed the sleeping arrangements. A large space was left on the side of the entrance doors for passage and for tables and benches.

Lyonya first took us to the men's side of the hall and assigned a lower level bunk bed and a locker to my father. Then he took us to the women's side. There were several empty bunk beds and he allowed us to select one that we liked. We found one bed where my mother could sleep on the lower level and I on the upper level. He also assigned us two lockers next to each other, and we had to purchase locks from him.

Then he told us, "Now you can accommodate yourselves and rest after the trip. Between five and six o'clock, before the day shift returns from the factory, go to the kitchen with your containers to get soup, and later come and receive your ration of bread from me. Meanwhile, if you need anything else, see me in my office over there." And he pointed at the balcony on the men's side of the hall.

There were some men and women who were sleeping during the day and we found out that they worked the night shift. At about five o'clock in the afternoon an old German guard in a faded military uniform and a gun across his shoulder whistled outside and inside the hall calling for the night shift workers to wake up and get ready. Most of them were already up, and they went to Lyonya's headquarters on the men's side of the balcony to get their bread rations.

We decided to get our bread rations too. Patiently we stood in line on the stairs leading to the balcony where Lyonya was distributing bread. When our turn came, Lyonya dismissed us. "You belong to the day shift. You should come later when it is their turn to receive bread." Then he told my father to find another man to share the loaf of bread. So we decided to go to the kitchen with the night workers to get the soup.

At five-thirty the guard whistled again and the night shift workers began to form a column. It was a small group and we saw them marching to the factory; the old guard

with a gun across his shoulder was marching beside them. My mother, father, and I ate the soup that must have been prepared to a standard recipe in all *Ostarbeitern* camps in Germany.

Soon after six o'clock we saw the first foreign workers returning in small groups or alone from the Heinkel factory. They all went to their residence in the former hotel building. Then a large column of *Ostarbeitern* arrived under the supervision of another old German guard. As the young men and women began to enter their respective quarters, the sounds of their voices magnified by the resonance in the tall gymnasium hall filled the air with a continuous and loud humming noise.

My mother and I were sitting on her lower bunk bed when a young girl who had just returned from work came to her bunk bed next to ours. She saw us and introduced herself in a friendly manner, "I am Tanya. You are new here. Is this your bed?" And hearing that it was my mother's bed and that mine was on the upper level, she exclaimed, "Good, my bed is next to yours!" Then she added, "How lucky you are to be here together with your mother."

From the first moment Tanya and I liked each other and a feeling of trust was instantly established between us. Right away she took charge of teaching us the camp's routine. She said to my mother, "You don't need to get your bread ration from Lyon'ka;<sup>11</sup> only one person should stay in line for two people to share." And she added with irony, "Those are Lyon'ka's strict rules." And Tanya and I we went to the men's side of the hall.

With curiosity I watched the ritual of bread distribution. Lyon'ka's attendants hauled the boxes with bread loaves from the kitchen to the balcony. Two long lines, one of men and the other of women, were on the two sides of a wide staircase with a passage in the middle for those returning after receiving bread.

For a while all patiently waited. Lyon'ka and his girlfriend Lyubka<sup>12</sup> were leisurely sprawled on chairs; he was holding the list of men and she, of women. But Lyon'ka liked to take his time for this procedure. The waiting, hungry people became impatient and one by one joined a chant initiated by Lyubka.

"Lyon'ka! Bread!.. Lyon'ka! Bread!.. Lyon'ka! Bread!"

Only when this chanting fully satisfied his vanity and self-importance, did he begin to distribute the bread. Each person had to tell his or her and partner's names; Lyon'ka and Lyubka took their time checking their lists and giving approval to the two attendants to put a small loaf of bread into the hands of a hungry young man or woman.

"You see," whispered Tanya to me, "what is happening? It is not enough that we have to obey the German's rules; we also have to be humiliated by our own kind. Look at him! He is sitting there like a Genghis Khan,<sup>13</sup> feasting his eyes and ears on the idolatry of his submissive slaves. Is it possible that he really doesn't know that everybody here hates him? Even his attendants loathe him; they say that Lyon'ka makes many arbitrary rules of his own that suit his and Lyubka's fancy, while saying that the *Lagerfuhrer* issued those regulations."

Finally it was our turn. I received my mother's and my daily ration, consisting of a rectangular loaf of heavy, dark bread weighing about eight hundred grams. It was a standard ration for two people.

We learned very quickly that each pair agreed on a system of dividing it into two equal parts. Some would cut it in half, measuring by eye, and then one would hold one piece in each hand behind his back while the other would select in which hand his half

would be. The others would just put the two halves on the table and alternate every day who will be the first to select his portion. And there were a few who made a primitive balancing scale and shaved the tiniest pieces to have a perfect division.

After receiving the bread ration each person hurried with his container to the kitchen to get a watered-down soup made with turnips or spinach and thickened slightly with flour. In this camp the soup was always given in abundance and one could even have a second helping most of the time. It tasted awful but it was hot and it filled the stomach. Tanya suggested saving some bread for the next day's breakfast or bringing it to the factory for lunch.

That evening we learned that at dusk, or at eight o'clock, whichever came first, the German guards whistled on the camp's grounds to call all *Ostarbeitern* to come inside the hall. Then they locked the doors of the hall until the next morning. Before it became dark outside, Lyon'ka's attendants pulled the black drapes over the windows for blackout; later in the evening when everybody settled down Lyon'ka switched off the lights leaving on dim blue security lights near the doors and bathrooms. This was a time when most men and women, tired after twelve hours of standing on their feet at the factory, would climb on their bunk beds and quickly fall asleep. For a while the low humming on both sides of the wall would fill the hall and then slowly diminish in intensity.

Tanya, who was sleeping on the next bunk bed, continued to inform me on the customs of this place, "You will hear soon what happens during the night here."

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1. Labor office.
  2. A town near the city of Dresden in Germany.
  3. See the chapter "Journey Toward the Unknown."
  4. Olga Gladky Verro, *Nel Campo di Ostarbeitern* [in Italian], MS, (Turin, Italy, 1956) ed. and trans by the author, 1995.
  5. A small town near the city of Dresden, Germany.
  6. Eclamation of tribute to Hitler used as a salutation.
  7. Nickname for Leonid.
  8. The interpreter [in German].
  9. *Heinkel Werke* - Heinkel Airplane Industries.
  10. Air Force.
  11. Deprecatory name for Lyeonyd, or for the nickname Lyonya.
  12. Deprecatory name for Lyubov, or for the nickname Lyuba.
  13. The Mongol conqueror of Central Asia, 1167-1227.

## Lyon'ka and Lyubka

By Olga Gladky Verro

The first evening, when my newly found friend, Tanya, and I had climbed onto the upper level of our bunk beds, she continued to educate me on the life and survival tricks that she had learned during her two years in the *Ostarbeitern* camp. We were lying close to each other and Tanya was talking in a very soft voice almost whispering to me.<sup>1</sup>

When the hall was almost quiet, a sharp scream from the men's side interrupted the silence with a vulgar tone of voice, "Hey, Lyubka! You, whore, try not to fall from the balcony and break your neck!" Several whistles followed and here and there one could hear laughter from both sides of the hall.

Lyon'ka admonished the indiscrete commentators, "You...!" And he emitted a couple of obscene words. "Shut up your dirty mouths! Are you jealous? Why don't you find a dame for yourself to sleep with?"

Lyubka meanwhile jumped over to the men's side of the balcony and also responded with vulgar words and phrases. Then she began to give smacking kisses to Lyon'ka, making sure it could be heard on both sides of the hall. Provocative comments from the audience followed and Lyubka shouted, mixing it with laughter, announcing every move she and Lyon'ka were doing during lovemaking, as if she was showing off, "You see, I can do anything I want!"

Tanya told me that almost every night Lyubka climbed from the balcony over the wall to sleep with Lyon'ka. She said that on some nights there was a mass migration of girls following the same route to sleep with their boyfriends. The young men were giving bribes to Lyon'ka to allow their girls to pass through his headquarters. He was strict about not allowing the men to climb over the wall to the women's side. Quiet recently he had received a reprimand from the *Lagerfuhrer* after some woman complained about such visits by the young men to their girlfriends on the women's side.

In the following nights Tanya recounted many things about people and events in the camp and told me what she heard about Lyon'ka and Lyubka. "I cannot be sure how much of it is true and what the people have added to it," she said. Probably, some is exaggerated. There is so much gossip about them going around. The rumors become known very quickly to everyone in the *Ostarbeitern* camp and maybe to all the foreign and German workers at the Heinkel factory. And you may hear some other variations from somebody else."

On this occasion Tanya said, "I will tell you first an interesting idea about gossips that I heard only recently. It goes like this, 'Gossips and rumors have very long legs and in a short time they may overrun half of the world. Gossips and rumors are like beer in the barrel; they are in a constant process of fermentation, in a constant change of substance; they are never the same in their content as they were when they were said for the first time. Gossips and rumors may bring a healing process to the long-lasting wound in someone's life, or they may pour poison on it that could kill the person. Gossips and rumors wander around like ghosts, sometimes filling the people with joy and sometimes with sorrow.'"

I wondered about her long introduction and commented, "Tanya, where did you hear such a philosophical description of gossips and rumors?"

"Oh," she answered, "I heard it from a person I admired very much. I liked it and memorized it. It just came to my mind now, as I began to tell you the story about Lyubka and Lyon'ka."

And Tanya began to tell me the stories she had heard from the others, including the girls to whom Lyubka had recounted some of it one day when she was very mad at Lyon'ka and wanted to get even with him.

For several evenings Tanya recounted all that she knew about these two dominant individuals whose personality and behavior had such a great influence on the

life of people in the *Ostarbeitern* camp of the Heinkel factory. And later I heard from others and observed many things myself that completed the picture of them.

Both Lyubka and Lyon'ka were orphans and from early childhood had lived in the same orphanage. They didn't particularly like each other, but after living together for a long time they had developed ties that bound them together first like brother and sister and later as lovers. Their self-centeredness was the result of their life in the orphanage, but they used different ways to gratify their needs.

Lyubka told some of the girls that in the orphanage Lyon'ka was at a disadvantage compared to the other boys of his age. He was always a sickly boy, small and skinny, with a bony face and body. The children in the orphanage had teased him a lot and treated him badly. But Lyon'ka learned to not show his open anger; instead he plotted revenge and waited for the best opportunity to put it in action.

Now as a young man he still had most of the same physical features he had as a boy, and a treacherous character. He remained short in stature and lean in body. His face was a grayish-yellow and was tightly drawn over the facial bones. But most prominent on his face were his bulging eyes, for which he got the nickname "Lobster-eyed." But even his enemies called him by this name only behind his back because everybody knew the phrase that he repeated often, "Lyon'ka doesn't forget." All were afraid that he would get revenge for everything, even the smallest thing, and sometimes even for those things that he only suspected that someone thought or talked with the others about him. He was very sensitive to what others thought and he usually punished those whom he suspected of thinking something bad about him. He also punished anyone who didn't want to be his pawn in obtaining what he wanted.

His vendetta was always subtle, well planned, and of long range, and sometimes he would execute it when the victim had already forgotten all about it. He had a special knack for not showing his anger until the moment when he was sure that he could implement his vendetta without danger for himself and when he was sure that it would be a big blow for his victim. If the conditions were not favorable for his success, he would press his thin lips together, grit his teeth, open his eyes wide and look at the person with contempt, and promise, "Lyon'ka doesn't forget. You wait, I will show you one day!" And he would spit through his teeth and leave.

Being physically small and weak, Lyon'ka was finding compensation for his lack of strength in his slyness, perfidy, and intrigue. He could not live without them; they were needed for him as nourishment for his ego. It was his revenge for his physical inadequacy. This was the key to his behavior. He liked to play mean tricks on people because it gave him satisfaction that he could do it to somebody who was bigger, stronger, or smarter than he was.

And he liked to see others suffer, even a sick person in pain could be a source of gratifying this need for him. He had a biting tongue, when it was safe for him to talk, but his soul was always poisonous. He ruthlessly sacrificed the honor, the feelings, and the needs of other people, especially those who were not sympathetic to him. But his perfidy was working against him because it prevented building rapport with others who were trying to maintain a more or less normal relationship even after he had done some wrong to them.

At the same time Lyon'ka was shrewd. One could say that he was acute and intelligent, but he used it in one direction only, to satisfy his desire to dominate the life

of others and to humiliate them; he probably believed that this gave him status, making him appear bigger, stronger, tougher, or invincible.

Lyon'ka was proud of his position as a *Dolmetscher*, which in German simply meant an interpreter, but for him it was a magic name, a title that gave him a superior status. He didn't work at the factory; his job was to be the eyes and the ears of *Lagerfuhrer* and to check that everything in the *Ostarbeitern* camp was going according to the rules established by the *Lagerfuhrer*. He spoke and understood German not very well, but sufficient for this task. However, he always translated in a way that it was in his own best interest, not exactly as it should be. Lyubka said that many rules and regulations that he was imposing on *Ostarbeitern* were his own inventions, but he was saying that they came from *Lagerfuhrer*.

Lyon'ka had several unofficial helpers, lickspittles whom he allowed to steal rations of food, cigarettes, and detergent before they were distributed to the *Ostarbeitern*. They kept some food and products for themselves and bartered the rest for valuable items from the hungry people in the camp, giving part of their loot to Lyon'ka. He also allowed some of them to go out of the camp into the nearby villages to barter some of the valuable items for food, beer, and *schnaps*, as hard liquor was called in German.

Lyon'ka and Lyubka didn't really love each other; they had a complex symbiotic relationship. One of the reasons was that he needed to have his own woman, as a status symbol and as a lover. She needed to be close to the person who had the power in the camp and most of all the abundance of food that he was giving her. And, although Lyubka and Lyon'ka were similar by being both self-centered and self-indulgent, she was in many ways different from him.

While Lyon'ka needed to dominate the group using treachery and fear, Lyubka needed to be preponderate in a group. She needed for the others to view her as a strong person who could be ahead of the others in starting any action, and she expected the others to follow her. She was the one who would start singing in the hall and expect that the others, not important how many, would follow her. When she would start an argument, she would do it loudly so that it could be heard on both sides of the hall; and she would expect the others to support her, as if she needed to have a public forum to air her frustrations.

The camp's environment, which was strange and oppressive to other *Ostarbeitern*, was not completely new for Lyubka. She grew up in a big orphanage family and the life in the camp was somewhat similar to what she was used to. It was not new for her to live without many comforts and without privacy, to sleep in a dormitory, to eat poorly prepared food. She had been accustomed from the childhood to fighting for what she wanted, to scream to be heard, to initiate the things, which she believed would bring her respect from the group.

Lyubka would use any opportunity to get the attention of the others. She used vulgar language in arguing, or simply in exchanging comments, and overused her rough voice to scream loudly so that everybody could hear her on both sides of the hall. It didn't matter if this was a good or a dubious occasion, like when she climbed over to the men's side and the men whistled and made dirty comments.

She grew up without a mother and a father who would love her and whom she would love, whom she could imitate in her behavior, and whom she could make happy

by being a good girl. Therefore, she didn't have the conventional moral principles that usually are acquired in a family. She was self-indulgent physically, emotionally, and morally. She was used to thinking only about herself, about her needs, satisfactions, and pleasures, and she had learned to obtain what she wanted at any cost.

She was not afraid of being criticized for her behavior, which seemed unconventional and immoral to others, and she declared with self-confidence, "How many of you would like to do what I am doing, to behave as free and open as I am? But you just suppress your desires because you are afraid what the others would think and say about you. You are hypocrites and cowards! Miserable cowards!" And she defended herself with her loud voice and vulgar words that made the others blush and feel ashamed.

Probably, she genuinely believed that she should be admired for her bravery in doing what the others were afraid to do. The bad opinions of others about her behavior had absolutely no importance and she didn't even bother to think about it. She didn't recognize the conventional moral rules, which she called hypocritical, and followed her natural instincts, which made her feel happy and outgoing compared to others who had too many scruples, or codes of conduct. She used to say, "If there is anything that makes me happy or gives me pleasure, I just do it. And why not?"

Everybody in the camp believed that Lyubka slept with several German men. Some were even saying that she was *Lagerfuhrer's* mistress. But no one could say for sure with whom, when, or where she met them. And even Lyon'ka was quarreling with her every time she suddenly had a new pair of stockings, or pair of shoes, or some fine lingerie item, or a new dress. At that moment he would shout at her with anger and everybody in the hall could hear him, "Lyubka, you bitch, who gave you this? Did you have to prostitute yourself for such rags?!"

But Lyubka was completely different from Lyon'ka in many other ways. She was not vengeful and quickly forgave the others, especially for the things that people said about her. In general, she gave little importance to their words. Her preferred saying was, "It entered one ear, and flew out the other one." But she liked to have a good fight with her hands or a good loud argument, after which she would reconcile quickly and behave with that person as though nothing happened. She solved the quarrel here and now and didn't keep a grudge for a long time or seek revenge later, as Lyon'ka did.

There was another side to Lyubka that one would never suspect. She was not cynical as Lyon'ka was and she didn't enjoy the suffering of others like he did. Just the opposite, she was sensitive to the physical pain of others and a sick person would receive all the help and comfort from her that she could give. For her, the sick person was a helpless human being who needed help and comfort. It was known that she helped many times and many people, especially the girls, when they needed help. We found out about her compassionate side later during the winter when my mother was lying in bed with a very bad case of sciatica and could not get up to go to the bathroom. Lyubka heard her lamentations and came to ask if she needed help.

Because Lyubka was physically strong and healthy, she simply took my mother in her arms and took her to and brought her from the bathroom. After that she called Lyon'ka and told him to advise *Lagerfuhrer* that my mother needed to be sent to the infirmary. When I came back from work, she told me, "Go to the end of the building up the stairs to the apartment of the gymnasium hall owners and borrow a small sled from

them and bring your mother down the hill into town to the infirmary for the foreign workers. She has already a pass from *Lagerfuhrer*."

Tanya also recounted how Lyubka helped several girls when they got pregnant. She taught them how to perform abortions using metal hangers. Such incidents also happened to girls from good families after they stayed for a long time in the *Ostarbeitern* camp.

Listening to Tanya made me aware that here, where the uncontrolled animal instincts of the camp's subculture were exalted as virtues, individual morals could be destroyed very quickly. Here one could not escape from hearing the swear words, the sounds of lovemaking, and the juicy comments about it. Here one could not hide from seeing the vulgar and crude behavior of both men and women, who allowed themselves to completely disregard the basic rules of socially acceptable conduct. Here the young women were prostituting themselves for a piece of bread, or just for a fleeting moment of closeness to another human being.

It was especially painful to hear about the very young girls who with the passing of time could not find any support in all this unscrupulous and rotten mass of bodies and souls. Those who remembered the moral principles learned in their families opposed their own decay with all their strength and for longer periods of time. But they also were not immune to the ravages of their souls and bodies and one by one were falling down like the rotten fruits from the tree before they were mature.

I couldn't sleep long after Tanya's soft whispering would stop and she was sound asleep. I was trying to convince myself that being with my mother and father would insulate me from the worst scenarios that Tanya described as happening to girls in this camp and that it would help me to maintain my dignity and self-respect.

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1. Olga Gladky Verro, *Nel Campo di Ostarbeitern*, [in Italian], MS, (Turin, Italy. 1956), excerpts, ed. and trans. by the author, 1995. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## Remnants of the Heinkel Aircraft Factory

By Olga Gladky Verro

On the thirtieth of September 1943, the morning after our arrival in the town of Oelsnitz in *Ostarbaitem* camp, it was the first day of work for my father and me at the Heinkel aircraft factory branch.<sup>1</sup> That morning at five o'clock sharp, an old German guard unlocked the doors of the hall and woke everybody up with the shrill sound of a whistle. Tanya told me to hurry up to the washroom before the crowd. She suggested to my mother that she wait until almost everyone finished, as she didn't have to hurry to the kitchen until six o'clock.

Tanya advised me, "Wear your own shoes to walk to the factory and carry the clogs, the work-shoes with the wooden soles; change them over there—they are so heavy that you will have blisters on your feet before you get there."

We quickly went to the kitchen and got our morning tea that was bitter, but hot;

with a small piece of bread left from last night it filled my stomach well. When the whistle of the German guard called us to go outside, we were already in our blue workers' uniforms and coats. Shortly before five-thirty in the morning, when it was still dark, we were standing outside the hall waiting for the rest of the day-shift workers to come out and to form a column.

It was a cold autumn morning and many young men and women were waiting up to the last minute inside the building before coming out. The old German guard was impatient with those who were late and he had to return several times to the hall to whistle and prompt the unruly crowd that was stalling. "*Schnell! Schnell! Verfluchte!*"<sup>2</sup> He hurried them on. When all were accounted for, he finally gave a sign with the whistle to start marching.

Finally, the column of the *Ostarbeitern* workers started its morning walk from the camp to the factory. Down the hill the column moved at a good speed, but as we reached the town streets with the cobblestone roads, the column slowed its pace considerably. The old German guard in a weathered military uniform and a gun across his shoulders was walking on one side of the column and loudly urging the workers to move quicker, "*Schnell! Schnell!*"

But it was not easy to walk faster on that road when most *Ostarbeitern* were wearing the heavy shoes with wooden soles. By this time most of them had already worn out the shoes that they had brought from home. I was grateful to my new friend Tanya for her suggestion to wear my regular shoes.

Compared to the privileged European workers, the *Ostarbeitern* needed about twice the time to walk to the factory. It was obvious why the others could do it in less time; they walked on the smooth sidewalk and didn't wear the heavy shoes that the *Ostarbeitern* wore. Later I found out that the Germans also fed them better, that they received ration coupons for some food, which they could buy in the town stores, and they were receiving packages from home with food and clothes. No wonder they could walk faster!

As I walked through the town, I was impressed with the clean streets and neatly kept houses. The German workers, who worked on the same wartime twelve hour schedule, were rushing out of their homes paying little attention to the column of *Ostarbeitern* marching on the road. We arrived at the factory gate having enough time for everyone to get to their machines and start work on the dot of six o'clock in the morning.

After successful bombardments by the Americans of the Heinkel airplane factory in Berlin, the salvaged departments that could produce a limited number of the airplane parts were moved to various towns in Germany. The finished parts were then shipped to other places where the assembly or a repair of the airplanes took place.

The carpet factory in Oelsnitz was selected, probably because it had adequate space to accommodate several departments from the Heinkel factory. In addition, it provided a good camouflage for such important war industry as airplane production.

There was possibly another factor that contributed to selecting the carpet factory for departments that made precision parts from special metal alloys; the process required a specific temperature range, and the carpet factory used a lot of steam in making rugs. The huge steam pipes, about one foot in diameter, ran along the whole length of the walls just below the big windows. They delivered the steam where it was

needed and at the same time provided heat. The carpet factory moved all their equipment and restricted operations to the upper floors. The whole ground floor was used to house the salvaged Heinkel factory departments, complete with all the machines and other equipment that had been moved from the Berlin factory.

Since it had been moved to Oelsnitz quite recently, and not all of the salvaged machines transported here from the original factory were in good condition, they needed to be repaired, tested, and installed. Before the departments could resume the production of needed airplane parts, lots of work needed to be done.

To quickly accomplish the transfer of the departments to the new place, specialized workers were needed; among them were electricians to make the repairs and electrical connections on all kinds of machines. That's why I was placed there as an electrician. There was also a need in the shipping department for workers who could read, write, and match the numbers on the shipping labels and on the airplane parts to be packed and shipped to the right destination.

When we arrived at the factory, my father and I, as the new workers, were introduced to the head engineer, who was very impressed that I spoke German so well. After hearing that we had just arrived from the front line in Ukraine, he took plenty of time to talk to us, asking about what was going on at the front and why we decided to come as a family to Germany.

My answer was simple and straightforward, "My father is an anticommunist. All his life he was persecuted for having been a volunteer in the White Army when he was a sixteen-year-old boy. When the German Army liberated us from the Bolsheviks, my father wrote many anticommunist articles in the local newspaper and later for two years of the German occupation of our town he worked as a manager of the soap factory that supplied the soap for the German troops." Of course, I didn't mention that he had escaped from the Gestapo concentration camp.

About me I said that I had worked at the small electric power station as the control panel operator and that I completed the first year of studies at the electrical engineering institute.

Then I explained that after the battle of Stalingrad, the Red Army was on the offensive and was pushing the German Army back from the Ukrainian territory. We could not take a chance to remain in our town and be sent by the NKVD to the concentration camps in Siberia. There was no other choice but to go west, to Germany, hoping to remain after the war in Europe free from the communist oppression. I concluded our story with our departure with the last train from the town of Stalino bringing the conscripted workers to Germany.

After listening with great interest to our story, the head engineer said cheerfully, "*Willkommen zu Deutschland!*"<sup>3</sup> Then he told his secretary to call the master of the shipping department and presented him my father as an educated man who could read, write, and work with the numbers well. He ordered that my father be placed on a job where they needed a person who could match the numbers for shipping and do the careful handling and packing of delicate precision parts.

Then the head engineer ordered his secretary to call the master electrician, *Herr*<sup>4</sup> Fisher.

After the conventional "*Heil Hitler!*" greeting, he told *Herr* Fisher calmly, but with reproach in his voice, "The masters of the machine departments are not very pleased

with the speed that the installation of the machines is going on.”

*Herr* Fisher answered in a tone of voice that clearly indicated that he was defending himself, “*Herr* Engineer, you know very well that we are short on qualified electricians. We are doing the best we can under these conditions.”

With a smile, the head engineer gestured at me sitting in the chair and said, “*Herr* Fisher, meet *Frauline*<sup>5</sup> Olga Gladky.”

*Herr* Fisher probably believed that I was a German girl and gentlemanly addressed me, “*Sehr angenehm!*”<sup>6</sup>

“*Sehr angenehm!*” I responded in German.

The engineer smiled and in a pleasant manner said, “Well, the *Arbeitsamt* found you an experienced electrician. Olga worked as an electrical panel operator on one of the power stations close to the frontline in Ukraine. She also had a year of college specializing in electrical engineering and she is familiar with the basics of working with electricity. She also speaks German well. I hope she will help you to catch up with revision and installing the machines that are waiting to be put in working order. Show her the work that needs to be done.”

Surprised, *Herr* Fisher looked at me in a manner as if he was doubtful about my qualifications and said with a tone of discontent in his voice, “*Jawohl, Herr* Engineer!”<sup>7</sup> Then he looked at me again and said, “Let’s go.” And he began to walk so fast that I had a hard time following him across the machine hall.

The electric workshop was located outside of the first machine hall, in the wooden barrack, part of which was occupied by the first aid station. *Herr* Fischer ordered two young German boys, Albert and Willi, to assemble a toolbox for me and to show me around the workshop. Both boys were waiting to be drafted any moment in the military service. They were friendly, good-natured, and were getting along well with everybody, but they were afraid of the master electrician, *Herr* Fisher.

During the first day I met all the other workers in the electric workshop. There was another female electrician by the name of Natalia, a short, plump Russian woman who had previously worked with the outdoor crew repairing electrical lines at a factory in Minsk, Byelorussia. As soon as she met me, she began to boast about how she used to climb the electric poles during the cold snowy winters and to repair the wires broken by the stormy weather. She was married, her husband was in the Red Army, and her daughter was here also working at the Heinkel factory. Natalia had the rowdy manners of a woman who was used to working with men and had acquired their rough language and behavior. She worked most of the time on the night shift and we later were seeing each other more on Sundays in the camp than in the workshop.

Then there was a young Polish man, Mischek, who was working now on the night shift with Natalia. She told me that he was giving himself an air of superiority in being an experienced electrician compared to her, the Russian woman. At the same time he behaved as though he was an equal with the German workers. He was a handsome young man who was very particular about his appearance. He was always impeccably shaved, had a neat haircut, wore well-pressed work clothes with a white shirt underneath, and wore dressy leather shoes polished to a shine to work.

Natalia told me, “Mischek receives lots of packages with clothing and food from home in Poland. But when he has his snacks at night, he never shares his salami sandwiches with me. And they smell so appetizingly with garlic that my mouth fills with

saliva."

The master electrician, *Herr* Fisher, was a middle-aged man, short and plump. From his round face one could notice mostly his black piercing eyes and black hair combed flat toward the back to cover the balding spot. He was an authoritarian by nature and didn't allow anybody to stay idle for a minute; he wanted to see everybody busy all the time working on something. Especially, he enjoyed giving us to file off the oxide from the copper contacts of the old high voltage oil switches, which probably would never be used. But...everybody had to obey him.

Then there was also one older German man, Otto, who was in charge of the compressor, and when *Herr* Fisher was absent for some reason, Otto substituted for him. He was always cheerful and good-natured and behaved as a father to everybody in the shop, for the Germans and for us, the foreigners. It was Otto, who little by little explained the rules to me, explicit and implied, that regulated the smooth operation and the relations between the people working in the factory and in our workshop.

For the first few weeks I didn't do anything else but stay in the workshop and file the old copper contacts. *Herr* Fisher usually was sending Albert and Willi to the machine halls for the electrical light problems. They had fun dismounting the flexible-arm lamps from the machines and bringing them in the shop, even if the repairs could be easily done on the spot without all that trouble. And they repaired them slowly; this way they could do something else other than filing the copper contacts... When they got behind in their work, *Herr* Fisher gave me some lamps to rewire, because sometimes there were too many of them for the boys to do. The soapy water used on the lathes to cool the metal dissolved the rubber insulation in the lamps' and the pumps' wires and caused short circuits. But I had to stay in the shop while the boys brought the lamps back and mounted them back on the machines.

It was Otto who, in the absence of *Herr* Fisher, started to send me to the machine halls for the small repairs of lamps, to put in the new light bulbs, change the fuses, or just find out what kind of problem it was. I liked Otto for giving me this opportunity and for his kindness and understanding. But one day, he disappointed me for another reason. It happened during the lunch when he was eating his sandwich and I, as all *Ostarbeitern*, was eating the watered-down turnip soup and complaining about how bad it tasted.

Otto suddenly said, "They give you some salami on Sunday, and margarine, and sugar. Why don't you divide it in equal parts and save some of it to eat every day? That's what my wife and I are doing when we redeem our coupons. But you just gulp it all as soon as it is in your hands!"

"Otto," I answered with resentment, "how can you divide one slice of salami, one square of margarine, and one tablespoon of sugar to last you for seven days when you are hungry on Sunday?! It was hard for me to save a piece of bread from last evening so I could eat it with the tea in the morning and a small piece now with this so-called soup!"

"You just don't have the willpower, like we Germans have," he answered with pride.

"And you don't understand at all how the hungry person feels!" I rebuffed him with indignation. But this sharp exchange of opinions did not affect his friendly disposition and he continued to treat me well.

One late afternoon, after I had worked about a month in the electric workshop, *Herr* Fisher called me to his desk and told me that he needed to send me to his

apartment to cook his supper. He gave me a pass to go out of the factory and a shopping bag with potatoes, meat, and bread. I accepted this chore with pleasure because I could get out all by myself earlier and walk on the streets without the supervision of the guard to return to the camp.

It was a gray late autumn evening, but it was not dark yet. I entered the apartment where *Herr* Fisher rented a room. Then, as *Herr* Fisher had ordered me to do, I found the small portable electric unit, placed the meat and potatoes on to boil, and then put the room in order. *Herr* Fisher arrived shortly and I asked if I had done everything all right. "Ya-ya," he confirmed "*Sehr good, sehr good.*"<sup>8</sup> Being used to his authoritarian manners, I could not make sense of his pleasant tone of voice and didn't like his sweetish glances at me. I asked him if I could leave because it was becoming quite dark outside. Instead, he invited me to remain and share the meal with him.

Hunger was the greatest enemy of common sense. It was very hard to say "No" in the room full of the appetizing smells of boiled meat and potatoes. With nice words *Herr* Fisher almost succeeded in persuading me to stay for the meal. But, although he was behaving very correctly at that moment, I felt very uneasy and decided that it would be a great mistake to accept his invitation.

"If I am late, they will close the doors of the hall. Besides, my father and mother would worry if I didn't come on time. *Danke schön,*"<sup>9</sup> *Herr* Fischer," I replied politely.

"You have your father and mother here?!" he exclaimed with disbelief.

"Yes," I answered, as I was putting on my coat. The expression on his face became hard and paltry right away. I opened the door to exit and wished him, "*Guten Abend,*"<sup>10</sup> *Herr* Fischer!"

Without answering, he slammed the door after me.

After that incident *Herr* Fischer began to tyrannize me in the workshop. He gave me all the dirty jobs, and screamed at me often for such things as leaving the screwdriver on the bench, or being too long in the rest room. One day *Herr* Fischer gave me a job that usually was done by two people, dismounting the motor and washing the parts in petroleum. I worked without hurry and by four o'clock in the afternoon began to put it back together. Shortly before six, *Herr* Fischer came in the workshop and began to scream at me, "It is not ready yet?! Well, you remain here until you finish the job!"

"You didn't tell me that it needed to be done by six o'clock," I protested. "If I had known, I would have asked Albert or Willi to help me. It is not fair to stay longer after twelve hours of work."

"Did you hear my orders?!" he interrupted me. "You stay and finish the job! Do you understand?"

"I understand. But, if it is needed so urgently, Mischek and Natalia could finish it during the night shift."

"Who gives the orders here?!" he screamed again. "You are staying here! *Verfluchte*"<sup>11</sup> Russian!" he swore at me and left.

"I am not staying," I said to myself. "It is time to put a stop to this humiliation." I ran to the office of the head engineer, who had known me from the day we arrived. I was hoping that the good impression I had of him was not deceiving me and that he remembered me.

"*Frauleine,*" I said to his secretary, "I need to talk to *Herr* Engineer right away."

"Oh, what happened?" asked the head engineer from his office. "Come in, come

in," he invited me with cordiality.

This gave me more courage and I told him everything starting with that evening when *Herr Fischer* had sent me to his apartment. And I concluded that the motor, which he ordered me to finish tonight, was for the lathe that was in a revision and wasn't needed for another couple of days, maybe more.

The head engineer patted me on the shoulder and said calmly, "I believe you. You had lots of courage to come and complain against your master. Don't you worry, hurry up, they are already gathering the *Ostarbeitern* in the courtyard to march back to the camp. I will talk tomorrow to *Herr Fischer* and tell him to stop harassing you." I began to express my thanks, but he interrupted me and just said, "Now, hurry up. *Guten Abend!*"

Both my father and mother approved my action and my father said, "It was a good opportunity to put a stop to his bad treatment of you. But now you have to be very careful and behave correctly, especially in doing good work because he will take revenge by finding fault with everything you do." I agreed, but was not sorry for going to the head engineer.

My friend Tanya, who knew the whole story from the beginning, said that it was good that the head engineer took my complaint seriously. But she suggested that I not tell anybody in the factory about this, especially my coworkers in the workshop. And she reminded me her little story about the rumors and said, "People could interpret this incident in many ways. All kinds of rumors could be started about you. It is better that nobody knows about it." And I agreed with her wisdom.

In the morning *Herr Fischer* saw me still working on the same motor and his eyes flashed with anger. "You disobeyed my orders!" he screamed. "I will show you who gives the orders here!"

"*Jawohl!*" I answered, lifting my head from work and at that moment saw the head engineer's secretary standing at the door; she had heard the whole outburst from *Herr Fischer*.

"*Herr Fischer*, head engineer wants you in his office right away," she said and smiled at me.

When *Herr Fischer* returned, he looked like a dog that had just had a good beating by his master. He didn't look at me the whole day and allowed me to finish my job at my own pace. It was obvious that he was scared of the head engineer who, probably, scolded him for his behavior. I was triumphant from my victory over that miserable man, but at the same time was afraid that *Herr Fischer* would vindicate himself at an opportune occasion.

In the few weeks that followed, I felt that *Herr Fischer* hated me for complaining to the head engineer, but he didn't dare taunt me anymore. He just gave me orders in a dry, detached manner and avoided looking me in the eyes. I didn't feel very secure, always afraid to make some mistake for which I would have to take his revenge. But there was no way out and I was trying to do my job the best I could. *Herr Fischer* didn't have another choice either, because at that time he had only the two young boys, Albert and Willi, and me during the day shift to help him. Mischek and Natalia worked during the night shift, while waiting for the new German master electrician to arrive from Berlin.

Notwithstanding the food deprivation and the humiliation of being led to the factory by the German guard with the gun across his shoulder and, of course, the tension in the workshop with *Herr Fischer*, my life as an *Ostarbaiter* was without much

preoccupation. In fact, one could do nothing beyond what was allowed by the authorities. One could live in a complete state of childish thoughtlessness. I was lucky to have my parents near me. Not being alone helped me to learn how to protect myself from the harsh and crude atmosphere of moral decay in the camp where ill manners and coarse language predominated. I couldn't do anything to change the situation, but I was able to insulate myself and mentally detach from it.

At the same time, I could understand that in those conditions many young girls were losing their hope for tomorrow and were living only for today. For many of them the memories of yesterday, of the family traditions and parental teachings seemed to have been vanished in the fog of the past. I heard that some young girls were making love only to take their minds off their loneliness and to fulfill their need of being close to another human being.

Then when their monthly period would stop, the most courageous would induce bleeding and eventual abortion with the crudest available tool, such as a metal coat hanger, and would end up in the infirmary for the foreigners to stop the hemorrhaging. Most would return to the camp in a few days. During the period I was in Oelsnitz I heard about only one girl who died from the infection. Those who were weak and couldn't do harm to their bodies would passively wait until the shape of their body showed the advanced pregnancy; then they would disappear from the camp to no one knew where. However, there were rumors about their destinations—either they were sent back home, which no one believed, or they were sent to work with the farmers' families, which was possible, or that they were sent to the concentration camp.

I was grateful to my destiny for saving me from all that mud. It was not a miracle or just my own moral strength that saved me, but the fact that I was not alone. I had the advice and support of my parents, with whom I passed most of my free time. In the factory, the presence of my father made any ill-intentioned young man feel uneasy. It made me feel secure and capable of defending myself from their open or veiled advances.

Also, the kind of work I did was putting me apart from the girls who worked in the machine halls and it helped me to maintain self-assurance and equilibrium in my relationship with the young men working in the factory. Once I had established the limits of what kind of behavior by the young men was acceptable to me, I jealously protected that standard. But I was young and liked to talk, to joke, and to have fun, which some young men could perceive as flirting, and I had to sometimes show those who dared too much that there was a limit in their behavior beyond which it was not acceptable to me. Anyway, I became very selective with whom I socialized and didn't pay any attention to those who annoyed me.

There were two young Polish men, Alex and Marko, with whom I felt very comfortable right from the first days, and I considered them to be my friends. Both of them treated me with respect and I began to trust them. It was a coincidence that both were interested in life in the Soviet Union, Alex as a socialist, and Marko as an anticommunist, and they liked to talk with me on their preferred subject. I confirmed Marko's ideas and had friendly political confrontations with Alex.

Marko worked on the lathe in the first machine hall close to the shipping department where my father worked. As I was coming to see my father during the lunchtime, Marko liked to join us and talk about the life under the communist regime. He

was older than most of the foreign men working at the factory. Although he was blond, the receding hair on his temples was noticeable and revealed his age. He was not tall, but had a muscular body build, which was inconsistent with the pleasant manners and calm voice that invited trustworthiness and emanated a feeling of warmth.

Every time I passed near his machine, he would stop me and engage me in conversation about the war and the systems of government in the various countries. He talked about his life in his native country, Poland, and about how he had lived and worked for several years in Africa. Marko saw that my father was weak and had problems walking. One day he placed in my hand coupons for bread and potatoes, telling me, "This is for your father." I accepted it the first time, but for the second time I didn't want to accept it anymore and he insisted, "Don't be afraid. There are no strings attached. I don't want anything in return. I receive many packages from home and I really don't need coupons. I truly feel sorry for your father."

One Sunday, when I came to get my evening soup at the kitchen that was located on the ground floor of the foreign workers' dormitory, Marko was waiting for me in the hall. However, he pretended that it was just by chance that he was there and he asked me, "What are you doing this evening?"

I answered bitterly, "What are the *Ostarbaitern* allowed to do? I will talk a little with my father and then I will go to sleep. Maybe I will also talk with my friend Tanya."

"How can you take this dreary life so passively? Don't you ever have a desire to run away, to go to the movies, or just to go for a walk? You don't look like a Russian peasant; if you were with one of us, the policeman would not stop you because they would think you are Polish or Czechoslovakian. Do you want to have some fun? Come with me, I will accompany you to the movie theater. We will be back before they lock your hall."

I was hesitant. Certainly I liked the idea. For many months I had not had any other diversion from the monotony of everyday routine, except some chatter with the young men at the factory. With his offer Marko made me feel uncertain and I didn't want to make a quick decision. "Wait," I said, "I will go and ask my father if he allows me to go."

My father didn't say either "Yes" or "No"; he began to reason, "Do you think, Lyalya, it is worth taking the risk of being caught by the policeman? Or to be late and to find the door of the hall locked? And then with whom would you go out? With a man much older than you, whom you know very little about, and whom you really don't care about at all. And he appears to me to be an old fox. I don't forbid you to go. You are already old enough to make your own decision. Until now you have kept your head on your shoulders. I told you my opinion, you do what you believe is right."

"I imagined already having a wonderful evening..." I answered with regret. "But you are right, Papa. This evening I will have a good sleep!"

I ran back to Marko, who was waiting outside, and told him, "I am very sorry, Marko, but you know that my mother is in the infirmary and my father is not feeling well. I don't want to leave him alone. I didn't have the courage to tell him that I want to go out. I thank you very much for your kind thought."

He looked saddened by my decision, but made me an offer, "If one day you can't stand any more of this monotonous life in the camp, don't be afraid, come and tell me. I will be glad to make you forget this dreary place for a few hours."

"Good night, Marko, and thank you again," I said, trying to appear cheerful."

"Good night, *Panochka*,"<sup>42</sup> he said, referring to me in Polish.

I returned to the hall and after finishing my soup I threw myself on my bunk-bed and had a good cry.

Tanya consoled me, "It is a healthy cry. It is better that you cry for making the right decision than for making the wrong one."

I was not crying for the movie that I was missing that night, but for my youth that was being wasted in that dismal place. I was crying because I longed for love that all young girls of my age are searching for, true love, with the idyllic young man, the prince of my dreams. Regrettably there were many young men who were ready to receive me with open arms to have an affair, but there was no one who was sincere in their feelings and intentions. Maybe Marko was sincere and he didn't have any self-serving intentions, but he certainly was not the prince of my dreams.

Soon after that evening the changes in the *Ostarbeitern* dormitory rules gave me a chance to test Marko's sincerity. One late evening during the winter, after the doors of the hall were closed, somebody forgot to turn off the water in the women's showers. The drainpipes had already been clogged for some time because the cleaning crew was not doing its job well and hair was accumulating in the drains. When the women were sound asleep the water flooded a good portion of the wooden floor in the hall. Since the doors were locked, nothing could be done until morning. As a punishment, the *Lagerfuhrer* ordered to shut off the warm water and locked the showers on the women's side.

He ordered that the women take a bath and wash their hair in the wooden shack where we washed our clothes. Although we could heat the water on a metal stove and wash ourselves standing close to it, the temperature inside was not much higher than outside. By taking my bath and washing our clothes in that cold shack I caught a very bad case of bronchitis.

I knew that all other foreign workers, except the *Ostarbeitern*, went to the public bathhouse in town. I remembered that Marko told me that I could easily pass as a Polish girl. I decided to ask him to accompany me to the bathhouse and he gladly agreed to do me that favor; he even wanted to pay for my ticket. I told him that money was not the problem for me.

I covered the "OST" insignia attached to the front of my coat with a coat lapel and wrapped a kerchief as a turban over my head, the way foreign girls and German women did in those days. Marko introduced me as a Polish girl to the German woman attendant in the bathhouse and I gave her a generous tip of five occupational *Deutschemarks*. For me that bath was worth ten times as much. I paid for a half-hour bath and stayed up to the last minute of it.

I washed my hair first and then indulged in a luxury of just lying in the bathtub full of warm water. It was a real sensual experience that relaxed not only my body, but also my spirit and my mind. When I came out, Marko was already in the waiting room and I greeted him with warmth and gratitude for bringing me there. On our way to the camp I told him, "This was the best experience that has happened to me since I left my home. I am going back to the camp not only with a clean body but also with a fresh outlook for the future. You have been a real friend, Marko."

From that day on I went to the bathhouse by myself and was a regular weekly visitor there. The bathhouse attendant was always considerate with me, and if she knew

that I was *Ostarbaitern* and not Polish, she probably couldn't care less because I was so generous with the tips I gave her. After all, we had plenty of the occupational *Deutschemarks* that we brought from home and could not buy anything with them without the food ration coupons.

A big event happened in the beginning of December when one Saturday night Lyon'ka announced from the balcony, "Tomorrow morning they will bring us to another camp to take a shower and to disinfect our clothing to kill all the lice that you have allowed to breed by not keep-ing yourself clean. While we are away our dormitory will be gassed to kill all the bedbugs. You should pack all your belongings from the lockers and from your beds and take them with you. If you have any food, it could not be left here or taken with you, you better eat it all tonight or tomorrow morning because it will be poisoned by the disinfectant. Early in the morning leave your lockers open and be ready to board the buses." And he repeated twice, "Remember, don't leave anything in the hall because it will all be burned with the pillows and the mattresses."

Very early on Sunday morning the whistles hurried us outside, where several trucks were waiting for us. Each truck had a German driver and a guard with a gun. "*Schnell! Schnell!*" the guards hurried us to board the trucks, which wasn't so easy with the bundles, bags, and suitcases that everybody was carrying.

It was a long drive on the main road to another town. Finally, we stopped on the outskirts of a large city. To our surprise, we recognized that the procedure was the same as we had undergone before our arrival in Germany when we took showers and our belongings were disinfected.<sup>13</sup> However, this time the medical checkup was omitted, and as soon as we were dressed in our disinfectant-smelling clothes, we boarded the trucks and had to wait in the cold until all the women and men were out of the building.

On our return, we found the hall smelling terrible with disinfectant, but our bunk beds had new mattresses and pillows filled with the fresh straw. Although everybody, including me, complained about the smell, I considered that the Germans did the right thing protecting themselves and us from the bedbugs and lice that usually thrive where a large number of people live and sleep in such proximity to each other.

On twenty-fifth of December, 1943, the German Christmas, we had a holiday and received the Sunday ration of salami, sugar, and margarine. For most young Russians and Ukrainians who were not used to the Christian tradition under the Soviet rule, this holiday didn't mean much more than the extra food and rest. And for those who were older, the Russian Orthodox Christmas was supposed to be two weeks later according to the old calendar, but nobody complained about this change of date.

January fourteenth, 1944 was my twenty-first birthday. That evening, when my father and I returned from the factory and received our bread ration, all three of us had our supper as usual on the women's side of the hall sitting on the steps leading to the balcony. My mother allowed us first to finish the watered-down soup and only then lifted the towel and presented me with a small but beautiful birthday cake.

"Happy twenty-first birthday, Lyalya!" she said.

"We wish you to have the next birthday in a better place," said my father.

And I added, "All three of us together."

I was puzzled by the inventiveness of my mother and asked for explanation, "Where did you got the cake?"

"It took some planning, some luck, and a piece of the off-white silk fabric that we

brought from home," she said proudly. "One *Frauleine* who works in the kitchen was getting married and was complaining to the other women that she could not find white fabric for her wedding gown. I approached her when she was alone and offered her to barter the fabric for your birthday cake and we made a deal. I think it was worth it. The hardest part was to bring it here without smudging the decoration because I was hiding it from being seen by anybody."

My mother carefully cut the cake while I was keeping the towel over it and my father was watching that nobody was coming up the stairs. We had to eat it hiding the pieces of cake between the palms of our hands so no one would see what we were eating. It was the most memorable birthday celebration I ever had.

Soon after my birthday my mother had to be placed for the second time in the infirmary for the foreign workers. Again she had another inflammation of the sciatic nerve caused by sitting on the cold concrete floor in the kitchen basement, where she was assigned to sort the potatoes, carrots, and huge turnips, keeping the good ones and throwing away those that were rotten. This time she stayed there for more than a month.

The infirmary was located in town about a twenty-minute walk from the camp. It was a small building with several rooms for the patients, one room where two young Russian nurses, Katya and Nadya, lived, and a little kitchen where they prepared food for themselves and for the patients.

Right away my mother ingratiated herself to the nurses and the German doctor who came from the hospital to see the patients. She offered to mend their stockings and socks, a tedious but necessary task. In those meager times those items were not easily found on the market and everybody had to mend them over and over to preserve those precious items in a wearable condition for as long as possible.

Even after my mother was walking without limping and her pain was gone, she stayed in the infirmary for several more weeks as she was busy mending a bagful of doctor's and his children's socks and his wife's stockings. She also helped the nurses in the kitchen, and when I visited her she would give me a canteen full of the left-over real soup made with potatoes and cereal for my father.

At that time in the infirmary there were several Frenchmen with whom my mother had plenty of time to talk and exercise her French, which she hadn't practiced for many years. One of the young men was Monsieur Etienne Demey, a French officer and a prisoner of war who was working on a nearby farm. He was very surprised to find out that among the *Ostarbeitern* there was an educated woman and they both enjoyed long conversations. Before leaving the infirmary my mother asked him to give her his address, which she would send to our friend Zoya Litvinova, my friend from Slavyansk, who was a daughter of my aunt Tanya's and my mother's friend. She explained to him that through him we could find each other after the war was over. His address was: "*Monsieur Etienne Demey, Demaine de Vadencourt a Maysemy, par Vermond Aisne, France.*" We mailed this reference address right away to Zoya.

At that time my mother did not anticipate that this address would later become a most important reference for our family.

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1. Olga Gladky Verro, *Nel Campo di Ostarbeitern* [in Italian], MS, (Turin, Italy, 1956), excerpts, ed. and trans. by the author, 1995. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Also see the chapters

"Ostarbeitern Camp in Oelsnitz" and "Lyon'ka and Lyubka."

2. "Hurry! Hurry! Damned!" [in German].
3. "Welcome to Germany!"
4. Mr. - in German.
5. Miss - in German.
6. "Pleased to meet you!" [in German].
7. "Certainly, Mister Engineer!"
8. "Very good, very good!" [in German].
9. "Thank you very much!" [in German].
10. "Good Evening" [in German].
11. "Damned Russian!" [in German].
12. "Miss" [in Polish].
13. See the chapter "Journey Toward the Unknown."

## Unexpected Improvements

By Olga Gladky Verro

When the doctor could not justify keeping my mother in the infirmary any longer, he had to send her back to the camp; however, he was kind enough to write a note to *Lagerfuhrer* indicating that perhaps she would be much more useful doing some other chores in the kitchen.<sup>1</sup> He said if she resumed her previous assignment in the cellar, she would be back to the infirmary in no time. When my mother presented this letter to *Lagerfuhrer*, he called the camp steward, showed him the doctor's note, and told him to find her some other job. She was assigned as a helper to the kitchen for the foreign workers, where she had to help peel vegetables, wash pots and pans, and clean the kitchen.

Being in the presence of the two most important men in the camp, my mother, of course, used this occasion to ask them for another favor. She told them that as she worked in that building where all other foreigners lived, she had found out that there was tiny empty room in the attic. Well, she asked them if it was possible to reunite us as a family and to allow us to live in that room.

My mother's German was good and we found out that most of the time it made a big difference in communicating with the Germans, who usually listened and many times responded positively. It did work this time too. The two men consulted with each other and found no objection except that they stated one condition, that we should clean thoroughly the room and keep it clean. That evening, when my father and I returned from the factory, my mother surprised us with the wonderful news. We moved to our attic room the next day. The room was high under the roof of a two-story building, and after they put two bunk beds there it was very small for the three of us. But it gave us privacy and we felt like a family again.

There we could take better care of my father who, as we found out, without my mother's supervision during her stay in the infirmary had been bartering part of his bread ration for cigarettes. He also needed better care for the sores on his legs, which we could wash every evening and apply the black ointment without everybody sta-

at him as if he were a leper, as had been happening in the hall.

My mother's job in the foreigner's kitchen was much better than in *Ostarbeitern's* and it had another important bonus. She was able to ingratiate herself with the German women who worked in the kitchen with her fake fortune-telling with cards. And her knowledge of German again helped her in this. All the women had some loved ones in the armed forces. They shared their hopes and news about them with each other. My mother listened, remembered, and told them what they wanted to hear.

One day she laid out the cards for one woman who only a short time before had said that her husband's leave should be due shortly. Well, my mother foretold her that some "king" was on his way to her door. In a few days the woman came to work announcing the happy news that her husband had come home for leave, and she brought a few boiled eggs and some butter for my mother in gratitude for her prediction. After this happened my mother became popular with her cards, although she was not always on target with her predictions. For her services the women allowed my mother to eat the leftovers of soup from the foreign workers' kitchen and many times to fill a canteen for us. Living in the same building where the kitchen was on the ground floor made it easier for her to bring it up the stairs to the attic in a hurry without being seen by Lion'ka or by *Lagerfuhrer*.

In addition she ingratiated herself with the camp steward, who found out that she had been a French teacher and asked her to give him French lessons during her free time between lunch and supper. For this favor he allowed the women to give her remnants of the foreign workers' soup and pretended not to see her eating whenever he came to the kitchen.

My situation in the factory with Master Fisher was tolerable, but I had to always be careful not to make any mistakes that could give him an occasion to punish me. Then another incident happened, which resulted in a significant change for me. It was shortly before six o'clock and I had just finished changing the fuses on one lathe in the second machine hall located across the courtyard from our electric workshop. I was talking to the young Polish man whose machine I had just repaired. I had the keys from the workshop and was waiting for *Herr Fischer* to go home, which he usually did as soon as Mischek arrived for the night shift. I knew that Mischek had the keys and he could lock the door if he was called to make repairs.

Suddenly I saw Mischek all excited looking for me. "Hurry up, run to the workshop!" he exclaimed.

"Did you forget your keys?" I asked him.

"No! But it seems that for some reason *Herr Fischer* left earlier than usual and locked the door. I came on time and found the workshop door glass broken by the new German master electrician who just arrived from Berlin. When I came, he was so upset! He said that he couldn't get in the workshop, that he waited for more than twenty minutes for somebody to open the door, but nobody came. Then he finally broke the glass, opened the door, and got in, but he cut his hand."

I began to worry. It was not enough that *Herr Fischer* hated me; now I would have another German that might be upset with me. As we were crossing the courtyard, Mischek continued to scare me by saying, "Do you know that you are in a bi-i-ig trouble!"

"Why should I be in trouble?" I asked.

"You will see, you will see... You better hurry and find a good excuse. I am not

going there with you. I had my share of his temper already. Now it is your turn to face the angry German alone."

I entered the workshop and with built-up courage greeted the man, "*Guten Abend!*" "*Guten Abend,*" he mumbled while he finished sweeping the broken glass from the floor. Then he looked at me and asked, "Was it you who had the keys from the shop?"

"Yes. I am sorry, but nobody told me about your arrival."

"Where have you been all this time? I waited and waited, but, my God, even a saint would lose patience!"

I detected that his tone of voice was more apologetic than accusatory. It appeared that he was not feeling at ease about breaking the glass. This made me feel more secure in explaining my whereabouts with more conviction than I had before coming in.

"I was called for repairs in the second machine hall when everybody was still here in the shop. I didn't know that everybody had to leave earlier than usual this evening. It was probably *Herr Fischer* who locked the door. We never leave it unlocked if nobody is here. I knew that Mischek, the Polish young man that you just met and who works the night shift, had the keys. So I was not worried about hurrying back at the end of the shift."

"Never mind," he interrupted my justifications, putting an end to it.

I tried to guess from his appearance what kind of a man he was. He was very tall and had large shoulders; however, he was skinny, especially showing it on his bony long face, which seemed longer, because there was not much contrast between his large forehead and the straight blond hair combed back. He was trying to look stern with his light-blue eyes, but that expression did not appear too convincing because the outlines of his blond eyebrows were barely visible to convey that message. It seemed to me that he was somewhat embarrassed for his impulsive behavior and I dared to ask him, "Please, don't tell about all this tomorrow to *Herr Fischer*. He is so strict."

"Are you afraid of *Herr Fischer*?" he asked me.

"Oh, yes." I replied promptly.

He was becoming at ease talking with me because I spoke German well and he could understand me. In an amused manner, he asked me, "Well, are you not afraid of me?"

"I don't know yet," I answered frankly. "I hope that you are more reasonable than *Herr Fischer*."

At that moment Mischek entered and was surprised to find the new master electrician completely calm and composed having a quiet conversation with me. Noticing Mischek, the new master electrician changed the subject and asked, "Who is working with me tonight?"

"I am," answered Mischek, "and another Russian woman who will arrive soon with the *Ostarbeitern* column."

"Very well, as soon as she comes, you shall show me around the machine halls."

Mischek spoke German well and he began to show him where we kept our tools in the shop. When Natalia arrived, the new electrician introduced himself as *Herr Weighelt*, the new master electrician, and asked us our names. At that time I had to leave to join the column of *Ostarbeitern* that was ready to leave. I greeted them all, "*Guten Abend,*" and left.

The next morning *Herr Fischer* met *Herr Weighelt* and I saw that he was pointing at the broken glass in the door. My heart began to pound as I was imagining the reaction of *Herr Fischer* for my part in all of this.

But *Herr Fischer* didn't pay any attention to me all day long and it would have been impossible for him not to use such an occasion to reprimand me. I thought, "It seems that *Herr Weighelt* didn't complain about me."

*Herr Fischer* ordered *Mischek* to begin to work at day shift next day and left *Natalia* to work the night shift with *Herr Weighelt*. He told *Mischek*, "Finally, I have a real helper. I was tired of making all those serious repairs by myself. You have to make a lot of connections for those machines that are ready to get into the production line." Hearing those words, *Mischek* looked all satisfied; they were adding to his already high opinion of himself. *Herr Fischer* gave *Mischek* a night off to rest before resuming the day shift.

That week, however, I assisted at an accident that could have been fatal for *Mischek*. He was working at the 500-volt fuse board hooking up the checked out lathes. The board was located above the large steam pipes running along the wall of the first machine hall. One could not reach the board without a ladder, but *Mischek* decided that he could work just by standing on the steam pipe that was about one foot in diameter.

Wearing his elegant leather shoes, he climbed on the pipe and raised his hand toward the board, which had many wires with live electrical current. As he was reaching up to remove the main fuse to disconnect the power, one foot slipped from the steam pipe, he lost equilibrium, and must have touched the live wire somewhere.

"Puf-f-f!" there was a big spark and *Mischek* fell on the floor. The steam pipe was a perfect ground and his body made a good connection through the leather soles. His luck was that his position on the pipe was very unstable and as he got the jolt he lost his balance completely and fell. If he had been standing in a more stable position, he would have been electrocuted. He was lucky; he got only a burned hand and arm and some contusions from the fall. However, the injury was serious enough that the nurse at the factory first aid station ordered that he be taken to the hospital and he didn't come to work for the whole week. But after this incident his pride about being regarded as a highly qualified electrician was somewhat tarnished.

A week or two from after the arrival of *Herr Weighelt*, I asked *Natalia* if she got along well with him. "Not too well," she replied with regret in her voice. "My German is not very good. With *Mischek* it was easy; when he spoke Polish I understood most of it. But *Herr Weighelt* gets upset with me because he doesn't understand when I try to explain to him about work and I have a hard time understanding what he tells me to do. So he gets upset and does most of the repairs by himself, except the lamps and fuses."

This talk with *Natalia* remained in my mind for several days. I was thinking that maybe this was my chance to free myself from the nasty *Herr Fischer*, if I just did it right. I decided to talk first with *Natalia*. I approached her at the first opportunity and asked, "Would you mind switching the shifts with me? My father has a very bad infection on his legs and the infirmary gave him some kind of a black ointment that smells like tar to use. He needs to change his underwear often and I need the time during the day to wash it."

To my surprise, she showed real interest in my proposition, and to be sure that I really meant it she asked, "Do you really mean that you want to work all the time on the night shift?"

"Of course, if *Herr Weighelt* is interested in having me."

"I would be most happy to switch because my daughter was changed to the day shift and I don't see her anymore except on Sundays."

"Well," I told her, "don't say anything to *Herr Fischer* yet. You know how spiteful and stubborn he is. He might oppose it just to show that he is the master. I would like first to ask *Herr Weighelt* about it, and if he agrees he should request *Herr Fischer* to switch our shifts. Don't you agree?"

"Yes. That will be better."

"Then I will talk to him tomorrow. Remember, don't tell anybody about it yet." I warned her again.

*Herr Weighelt* knew from our first encounter that my German was good enough and there was no difficulty in our understanding each other. But I didn't expect that he would agree so quickly to the idea of me working with him. He must have been really frustrated with Natalia's German, because as soon as I started to talk to him about switching the shifts with Natalia, he answered without hesitation, "All right. I will arrange it with *Herr Fischer* tomorrow, so you can start the night shift on Monday."

Hearing these words was like music to my ears; it lightened my heart and I felt like the sky was clearing up from the dark clouds.

"But remember," he warned me, "I will work the night shift all the time, and once you switch you also have to work only at night. There should be no changes back and forth."

"No problems, *Herr Weighelt*, it suits me just fine."

That Saturday *Herr Fischer* came to me and for the first time after the incident looked straight in my eyes and, with an expression on his face that seemed like he was pronouncing my punishment, he gave me an order, "Beginning Monday you are assigned permanently to the night shift to work with *Herr Weighelt*." And he added sternly, "Do you understand?"

"*Jawohl, Herr Fischer!*" I answered, keeping myself from smiling and showing him that I was elated to be finally freed from him.

Changing my shift gave me an extra free day on the first Monday. I slept late, a luxury that I had not had from the first day I went to work at Heinkel factory. After I'd eaten the usual watery turnip soup, my mother arrived from the kitchen and pulled out from underneath her sweater two potatoes baked in the stove ashes behind the cook's back. They were still warm. We peeled them and seasoned them abundantly with salt also smuggled by my mother from the kitchen.

"Now that you are here during the day, I could sometimes bring a baked potato for you," she said before returning to wash the dishes and clean the foreign workers' kitchen.

In the afternoon of my first free day from work I engaged in a complicated procedure of washing our clothes in a wooden shack beside the kitchen of the hotel building. There was an old metal wood stove that we had to start to heat the water in the metal washbasins that we used. It took some time to wait for the water to be hot enough to wash out the black ointment spots from my father's underwear. I could not remove them completely and his underwear looked like leopard skin. For several weeks he had been using this ointment given him in the infirmary, but the sores on his legs were not showing signs of healing. The doctor said that with the warm weather they

would heal when exposed to the sun. But I was convinced that they were not healing because of poor nutrition.

The day before I began working on the night shift Tanya, who before the war worked as a hairdresser, told me, "You have asked me many times to cut off your braids. Now is the right time to do it. Most of the people who work the night shift don't know you. I will make a new girl out of you." I agreed.

Tanya cut my hair, and put in curlers made from rolled paper, and it came out a very modern wavy hairdo. It came out so nice that looking into Tanya's small mirror I couldn't believe it was I. Without braids I no longer resembled the typical Ukrainian girl, but looked now like a young European *Fraulein*.

That evening the Czechoslovakian young men made a protest to sympathize with us, the *Ostarbeitern*, for being treated like prisoners of war. They usually walked to the factory one by one, or in small groups. That evening, when we were marching in a column on the road, they marched on the sidewalk parallel to our column and one of them was imitating our German guard counting "*Eine, zwei! Eine, zwei!*"<sup>2</sup> They raised our spirits by this outpouring of solidarity.

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1. See the chapters "*Ostarbeitern* Camp in Oelsnitz" and "Remnants of the Heinkel Aircraft Factory."

2. One, two! One, two! [in German].

## My German Mentor Herr Weighelt And My Friend Karel

By Olga Gladky Verro

When the night shift column entered the factory courtyard, I found Natalia, who was already working on the day shift. She urged me, "Hurry up! *Herr* Weighelt was called to the third machine hall before he had a chance to enter our workshop. There is a big press-machine that stopped working and he might need your help."

I ran to the third hall. There was much confusion. Masters and operators gathered around the machine trying to outguess each other about what was wrong with it. *Herr* Weighelt was quietly inspecting the motor, and as I came close to him I said in a low tone of voice, "*Guten Abend, Herr* Weighelt. Is there anything you want me to do?"

"Ah, you are already here? Good, go to our workshop and bring me my toolbox. Here are the keys."

I was eager to have a good start with him and ran to and from our workshop. He asked me to hand him some tools to dismount the complicated switch and then sent me again to our workshop to find a heavier copper wire to replace the thin wire that had melted inside. Then he replaced the fuses and all standing around the machine were surprised that it did work right away.

As *Herr* Weighelt worked, he was calm and gave me precise instructions on what I had to do to help him. It was obvious from our first job together that we could work well as a team. When we finished and were returning through the courtyard to our

workshop, he told me in a friendly manner, "If you will always perform like you did just now, we will get along very well."

"I like this work," I replied, "If you train me, I will try to do my best."

"I was amazed that you understood everything I told you to do," he said complimenting my German. Then he complained, "Do you know, that woman, Natalia, was driving me crazy. She couldn't understand anything I told her to do. It was impossible to work with her."

"Well," I explained, "I studied German for five years in school and technical German for one year in the Institute. Then I worked as electric panel operator on a small power station during the German occupation and had two years of practice with the Germans who were in charge."

As I was telling him all this, *Herr Weighelt* was repeating, "Good, good, very good."

"What is 'good'?" I asked him.

"Your German is good. I can understand you and you can understand me." Then he added, "You said that you would like to learn this work. That's also very good." And with determination he concluded, "I will train you."

For the rest of the night shift there were no big repairs. I was called only once to change a light bulb. This gave *Herr Weighelt* and me the time to get acquainted with each other. He showed me photographs of his baby boy and of his young, very pretty wife. He explained why he was traveling every weekend to see his family, "My wife decided to remain in Berlin because she didn't want to leave our apartment and to lose all the new furniture we bought only last year. Working on the night shift gives me extra daytime hours. Besides, I like to work at night when there are not so many bosses around. It's also not so busy—there are fewer machines working and only emergency repairs need to be done; all the rest can be left for those who work in the day shift."

*Herr Weighelt* was curious to find out what happened between *Herr Fischer* and me. I decided to tell him the truth; there was no reason to keep it secret from him.

"Hmm," he reflected, "were you not afraid to complain to the head engineer?"

"No, because I knew that he would believe me and would treat me right. When we arrived here from Ukraine, the head engineer interviewed me and my father and he treated us with respect."

"Is your father here too?" *Herr Weighelt* wondered.

"My mother is here also," I added.

He got interested in how I happened to come to Germany with my parents and I recounted some highlights from our family adventures.

After midnight he told me, "Open a few drawers in the storage unit, hide behind them, and sleep for a while. I will write a letter to my wife and keep watch in case someone comes here. After you have rested, you shall keep a watch and I will sleep there. This way we don't have to sleep too long during the day and can use our time doing something useful. Tomorrow I have to search to see if I can buy some food from the local farmers without rationing coupons. I bring all my coupons to my wife because in Berlin without coupons one cannot find anything. She is breast-feeding the baby, who is growing fast, and both of them need good nourishment. I can do with what I can find here."

"You are a good father," I commented, "and a good husband."

"I am very lucky man," he said with conviction. "I have a beautiful and intelligent

wife and we have a baby boy who is the joy of our lives. They both are lucky to have me not too far away, not on the front line, and close enough to come home every weekend and to take care of them. In these difficult times of war not too many could claim such blessings. Working for many years at the Heinkel aircraft factory saved me for some time from being drafted. However, lately there were indications that all able-bodied men would be called to military duty. That's why I sacrificed all my healthy teeth." And he opened his mouth slightly and showed me the brand new dentures. "This way now I have two exemptions that should keep me close to my family."

I was very surprised that he was sharing with me such confidential things about himself, which I was sure he wouldn't tell any German. *He must trust me*, I thought and in that moment I felt that I was lucky, too, to work with this man, because he was treating me as an equal human being.

On the second night *Herr* Fischer sent us a surprise. He left a note for *Herr* Weighelt. As he finished reading his note, *Herr* Weighelt banged his fist several times on the desk and exploded in indignation, "Who does he think he is?! He wants to order me as to what we have to do on the night shift! The night shift has to take care of the emergency repairs. Regular maintenance work has to be done during the day shift. That's why he has four people, Mishek, Albert, Willi and Natalia, who are there to do this type of work. He is imagining being the master of the electric workshop. He is not. He is the same master electrician as I am; he works during the day shift and I work during the night shift."

"What is the matter?" I asked him cautiously.

"Come here and read it," he said and he handed me the note.

It was an order: "Weighelt, all ceiling lights in the machine halls need to be checked out and the burned light bulbs need to be replaced. Order Olga to do this job tonight. Fischer."

"Well," I said, "I better do what he ordered; otherwise, he will change me back to the day shift. He is capable of doing it."

"You will not do such a thing!" ordered *Herr* Weighelt. "Let's go to the first machine hall and check to see if there are any machines that are in the dark."

"Which light bulbs need to be replaced?" *Herr* Weighelt asked the master of the machine hall.

Master showed him about four or five machines that could use a little more light.

"You will replace those light bulbs and not one more. You have other work that needs to be done in the workshop. Did you hear me? That's an order!" he said sternly.

"*Jawohl*, *Herr* Weighelt, I will get the ladder," I said.

"I have one strong young man whose machine has a mechanical problem and he has nothing to do," said the hall master. "I will tell him to help you with the ladder."

"Good," accepted *Herr* Weighelt, "this way I will be available if some repairs need to be done."

"Karel, come here," master called the young man. "This girl needs help with the ladder to change the light bulbs. She will tell you where to put it. And watch that she doesn't fall."

That's how I met Karel, a tall and handsome Czechoslovakian who helped me that night. He moved the ladder between the narrow rows of the machines, making sure that it was stable before I climbed all the way up to the high ceiling. After I changed the

light bulb and came down, it was difficult to get down from the ladder in the narrow space and Karel promptly guided me down by holding me with his strong hands at the waist.

When we finished with those light bulbs that *Herr* Weighelt ordered me to do, Karel suggested that we change all the others that were burned.

"No," I said, "those will be changed tomorrow during the day shift."

"What a pity," he said jokingly, "I just began to like it...I mean to like helping you."

"Thank you very much for your help," I said, ready to leave.

"Do you have to go back right away? My machine is out of order. Could you stay a little and tell me something about you?" he begged me.

"Well," I answered, "just a little as a reward for your help." I sat on the ladder step and Karel leaned against the frame of the lathe.

"Why have you selected such an unusual occupation for a young girl?" he asked me.

"It was not unusual in the Soviet Union. You probably know Natalia, another Russian woman, who worked on night shift before me."

"I didn't notice her," he answered and added with a smile, "If she was a young girl, I would have noticed her."

"I have to go now," I said with determination. *Herr* Weighelt will think that I am lost."

"Will you be working tomorrow night?" he asked. "If you do, come to see me. My lathe is over there."

"If I have some repairs to do around here, I might stop to say hello."

Karel escorted me to the door of the machine hall and placed the ladder on the floor against the wall. I thought, "What a nice and pleasant young man. But he didn't tell me anything about himself; he just asked questions about me. Maybe I should stop tomorrow night and find out something about him."

In the morning, *Herr* Weighelt waited until all the day shift workers had arrived in the workshop; only then did he approach *Herr* Fischer. He spoke to him in a very loud voice, "Listen, Fischer, you and I are master electricians. You are not the master of the electrical workshop and are not my superior. Each of us is responsible for the work that has to be done during our shifts. You have many helpers," and he pointed at Mischek, Natalia, Albert, and Willi, "I have only one helper," and he pointed at me. "You give orders to your people, and I give them to mine."

Then *Herr* Weighelt began to gesticulate with his right hand as if he was cutting the air in front of *Herr* Fischer. "Don't you dare give me any more orders, or tell me what my helper has to do during the night shift! Changing all burned light bulbs is the maintenance work that has to be done during the day. During the night we do the emergency repairs. Last night I asked the machine hall master where he needed light and we changed the light bulbs in those places. The rest is your responsibility!"

And he left the workshop without giving to the stunned and humiliated *Herr* Fischer a chance to respond. Everybody in the shop was quiet and trying to make believe they were so busy that they could not hear anything. I slipped outside the door thinking, "Bravo, *Herr* Weighelt, you have put *Herr* Fischer in his place!"

After this happened, *Herr* Fischer didn't give us orders any more.

*Herr* Weighelt took quite seriously his promise to teach me all that I needed to

know as a machine repair electrician. Unless there was a call from the machine shop master about an emergency situation, he was not going there. He would send me first to assess the problem and to repair it, if I knew how. In case I had difficulty in finding the problem, he instructed me to come back to the workshop and to tell him what I had done so far, and he would explain to me what I could try to do it myself. Only when it was beyond my ability to solve the problem would he come and take over the job.

Most of the repairs on the lathes were caused by the cooling system of the soapy water that was poured on the metal turning at a high speed. The soapy water was splattering all over the machine and softening the rubber insulation on the wires, causing short circuits and burned fuses. Usually it required removing the flexible-arm lamp from the machine and attaching another one in its place while the rewiring of the old lamp was done in our workshop. The other most common repairs that were needed because of the same problem were the replacement of wires leading to the cooling pump, and less frequently those leading to the motor.

In the beginning some machine shop masters would send me back to call *Herr Weighelt* if the repair was not for the lamps or fuses. They didn't want me to touch anything if the machine was not working; most of the time only a faulty wire needed to be replaced or a fuse changed. Well, *Herr Weighelt* was firm in establishing respect for my abilities by insisting that I was qualified to do the job. Sometimes I had to return to the workshop several times to ask his advice and he would allow me to finish the job by myself.

After several weeks all machine shop masters accepted that I was the first one to inspect the problem. Those were my first steps in becoming a bona fide machine shop repair electrician. It was very rewarding for me to have the masters and workers trust me for my skills. When I began to work with *Herr Weighelt*, most of them worked in the night shift and didn't know me. The majority of them were Polish, Russian, and Czechoslovakian young men. The word got around that the maintenance electrician was a young Russian girl. And the young men used all kinds of tricks to test me and find out how much I knew about electrical repairs. Some would slightly unscrew a light bulb or a fuse on the panel and call the master, "There is no light. Shall I go and call the electrician?" From their half-smiles I could detect right away that they wanted to make fun of me and I would not give them too much satisfaction. Right away I would test the current in the outlet, give a half-turn to the light bulb, or to the fuse, and the light would shine. They didn't dare simulate problems with the machine motors, fearing their master.

But as I came to know most of them, I understood that the twelve-hour shift was a very long time to stand near the machine making the same parts one after another. They needed some distraction to break the monotony of work, especially at night.

My mobility as a repair electrician made it very easy to be called when someone became bored and needed a few minutes to talk to somebody and to rest. The excuse of not having the light was a very convenient way for them to stop the machine, to walk to the electric workshop and back, relaxing their leg muscles from standing in one place, and to exchange a few words with a young girl. I really didn't mind being called to solve the fictitious repairs because I also liked to socialize a little with the young men who became friendly with me.

During the night shift there was a more relaxed atmosphere and I was free to walk through the machine halls and visit with some of them and exchange a few words.

However, most of the time I could prolong my visit when making legitimate repairs. After a few weeks working on the night shift I had many friends in all machine halls. My knowledge of German made it possible for me to communicate with workers of different nationalities as long as they also spoke German. And my native Ukrainian and Russian languages were helpful in talking with those who spoke Polish, Czech, or Slovak. Soon the young men stopped making fun of my occupation, which was unusual for women in Europe and I enjoyed my popularity; also the twelve hours of work at night seemed to pass much quicker than before during the day shift.

By teaching me the tricks of the trade *Herr Weighelt* had trained himself a good teammate, and one night he had reaped his rewards. It was after the midnight and, according to our secret schedule, it was my turn to be awake, while *Herr Weighelt* was sleeping behind the drawers partially pulled out of shelves. Suddenly, I saw through the glass in the door the master of the first machine hall walking fast toward our workshop. I quickly woke up *Herr Weighelt* by calling aloud, "Herr Weighelt! Look who is coming here! They must have some serious problem in the first machine hall! Get ready to go there!" He woke up and somewhat dazed came out of hiding before the master entered workshop.

In fact, the master was very upset and, without entering he urged us from the open door, "Quick! Quick! The whole damned machine hall is without power and without light!"

"Ya, ya! We are coming," replied *Herr Weighelt* and ordered me to grab our toolboxes and to follow him. After we got to the dark machine hall he sent me back to the workshop to get fuses for the 500-volt main fuse board. I arrived back in a few minutes, just in time to see that *Herr Weighelt* had secured a battery operated flashlight and was trying to test the main 500-volt input line with the 220-volt test bulb.

Immediately there was a big flash and a blast from the short circuit exploded the test light bulb and shook the machine hall; and it did shut off the main oil-switch in the transformer room, leaving the whole factory without power. I saw *Herr Weighelt* cover his eyes with the palms of his hands and I ran to him asking, "*Herr Weighelt*, how are your eyes?!"

He whispered, "I cannot see anything..." And then said in a loud voice to the master, "A wire is touching the ground somewhere. Don't you worry; we have to go to the transformer room to reset the main switch. Tell everybody to switch off their machines. When we come back you will switch them on one at a time to find the culprit." Then he whispered to me, "I cannot see anything... Try inconspicuously to guide me toward the door. Let's hope that in the darkness nobody notices that there is something wrong with me."

I took the flashlight from the board and gave *Herr Weighelt* his toolbox. Then I took him by the elbow and led him to the courtyard, where the masters from the other machine halls were running and complaining that they were in the dark. *Herr Weighelt* told them to go back to their halls and to tell their workers to switch off all the machines until the power is restored. He reassured them that in a few minutes they would have power.

*Herr Weighelt* gave me the keys and told me to open the door of transformer room. "Close it immediately," he said. "Let me sit for a moment and maybe my eyes will improve. Damned! All I can see is the bright flash. Fortunately, the wires on the test bulb

were very long and I didn't burn my hands." A few minutes passed and he still couldn't see anything.

"*Herr Weighelt*," I said, "I worked for two years at the power station where we had 2,000-volt lines. During the artillery shelling we had the power lines down many times and I have reset the automatic oil switch many times. Let me now do it here. We cannot keep all the halls without power waiting until you begin to see."

"Are you out of your mind?" he replied. "Look what kind of stupid mistake I have done! No-no-no! If something should go wrong, or should happen to you, I will be in big trouble. As a foreigner you should not even be admitted here."

The minutes were passing quickly and I repeated, "Listen, we cannot keep the whole factory in the dark. We have to do something. Have you been in this transformer room before?"

"Yes, once."

"Well, let me look around and tell you where all the equipment is located. I will tell you what I see and you check if I am right." I moved the flashlight around the room and said, "Here on the side of the cabinet is the drawing of the electrical circuits in the transformer room. Let me see... Here is the main incoming line. Here is the transformer, and here is the automatic switch and the outgoing line. Let's find it in the room. Do you remember where the automatic switch is located?"

"No, damned! My eyes are not getting better. Olga, please don't touch anything! Just tell me what you see. I am afraid that you could do something wrong."

Meanwhile I was moving the flashlight around the room and found the outgoing wires and the main automatic oil-switch. "Well," I said, "I found the oil-switch and it is on the automatic shut-off position. And here is the handle for the manual resetting." I was reasoning aloud more to reassure myself than talking to *Herr Weighelt*, but hoping that he was checking on my findings.

"It did go off from the short circuit I made with the 220-volt test bulb," he admitted and began to reason aloud, "I removed the main fuse leading to the machines in the hall. So, if we switch on the oil-switch, the power should go to all halls, except the first hall. Right?" He asked me for confirmation. "Now check one more time where the oil-switch is, and if everything is as you told me. Then lead me to the switch and place my hand on the handle for the manual resetting. I will push it. Whatever might happen, I can say that I did it. Because if something goes wrong and you, the foreigner, did it, it could be easily considered sabotage. I cannot allow you to do this task. Well, let's do it!"

I took him by the arm and led him to the oil-switch; then I placed his hand on the manual-resetting handle. He touched it reassuring himself that it felt right.

"Ready?" I asked.

"Ready!" he answered. And together we pushed the handle down.

Everything was quiet inside and outside. I said calmly, "I can see streaks of light in the windows of the second machine hall."

He emitted a deep sigh of relief. "Now," he said, "let's solve the next problem. I cannot see anything yet and cannot show myself in this condition in the first machine hall. Now it's your turn to show me how much you have learned. Go there and ask the master if all the machines have been switched off. Then tell him that you will put in the new main fuse. He might object to you touching the main fuse board. Tell him very convincingly that I have to stay here to check what happens when the main fuse is back

on the panel. I have already removed the fuse from the bad line. Don't replace it. I repeat, replace only the main fuse. If everything works fine, tell the master to order the workers to switch the machines on one by one, not all together. And tell the master that the machines that are on the line that caused this problem cannot be used tonight and should be thoroughly checked during the day shift tomorrow."

Before I left, he asked me again, "Have you understood everything I told you?"

"Yes, everything is clear." I replied.

"Be careful."

"Don't you worry. I won't use the testing light bulb," I said jokingly.

"Don't say foolish jokes," he admonished me. "The machine-hall master doesn't understand what happened. All these mechanical masters know their job very well, but they are all ignorant about electricity. Remember, nobody should know what really happened. My reputation will be in real jeopardy!"

"*Herr Weighelt*," I said convincingly, "I don't know anything about what happened. Remember that I went to our workshop to get the fuses and arrived after it was all over. That shall be my answer if anybody asks me about it. Only you know and can explain it all."

"*Danke schön*," he said, relieved that I would keep his secret. "Now hurry up and go change that fuse. When you are done, come here and help me get to the first aid station. I cannot see anything yet."

I explained to the machine hall master that *Herr Weighelt* instructed me to change the main fuse, which was usually forbidden for me to touch. But under these extreme circumstances the master didn't even think to object. As soon as the power was on without any problems, the master went to prompt his workers to start the machines—except those that were on the problem line.

I collected the burned wires and the broken test bulb to remove the evidence of what happened. Only Karel came to see what I was doing and, as he was walking with me to the door, he asked me somewhat sarcastically, "How come your master electrician didn't come to change the fuses? Is he feeling all right?"

"Of course," I answered.

"Don't try to fool me," he replied. "I understand what he did wrong."

"What you are talking about?" I rebuked him.

"He blew up the power to the whole factory," he replied.

"I didn't see this happen. When I came, the power was off everywhere and the short circuit was in the problem line that *Herr Weighelt* had disconnected," I rebuked him again.

He dropped the argument and asked me, "Do you need help?"

"No, Karel. It is enough if you don't spread any false rumors."

"Are you so faithful to your German master?"

"Sure, I am. Where can I find another German that would treat me with such fairness and respect as *Herr Weighelt*? Could you tell me why shouldn't I treat him with the same respect that he gives me?"

"You are right," Karel responded in a conciliatory manner. "But I was... Well, nothing, nothing... You better hurry; he probably needs your help." And he left me at the door.

From the time I began to work in the night shift Karel was among several young

men that I considered being my friends. I thought it was strange that Karel, who was always good and helpful with everybody, became upset by the fact that I was faithful to *Herr Weighelt*. I never flirted with Karel and believed that he also considered me to be just a good friend, but that night I detected that he was jealous. "Well," I thought, "it means that for him I am more than a friend." And I liked it.

I returned to the transformer room and accompanied *Herr Weighelt* to the first aid station, where he remained almost until morning. He told me, "Now you are in charge. Consult me if any serious repair should come up."

I was lucky; I didn't have to change even one light bulb that night. To keep myself awake I wandered through the machine halls, stopping here and there and exchanging a couple of words with some of my friends. Most of them asked me what happened that night with the power shutoff. "Oh, nothing serious," I answered, "there was a shorted line in the first hall and it knocked out the automatic switch to the whole factory."

At the midnight break I found myself in the first machine hall not by accident, but because I had reflected on what Karel said to me earlier that evening and wanted to spend those fifteen minutes with him. I liked him, his radiant smile and his open, honest-looking face. But most of all I liked that he was gentle and a gentleman.

Karel was happy to see me. We sat on the bench near the wall next to the others, who were having their nap. The master had shut off the lights, leaving on only the weak blue emergency lights.

"I am truly sorry for my stupid remarks about *Herr Weighelt*," he whispered so as not to disturb the others who were sleeping. "You are a good girl and he is treating you right." He took my hand and began to teach me the names of the fingers in Czech language.

The blue light made everything appear mysterious and unreal and fed away my imagination, "Could this be the beginning of a wonderful dream?" I was twenty-one years old and longed to find a true love. I was awakened from my dream suddenly as the bright lights illuminated the hall and the loud bell called the workers to return to their machines. Some of the young men had noticed that Karel and I were sitting together during the break and they made some good-wish comments to us. I didn't mind hearing them. From that evening Karel began to call me more to his machine and I was stopping by on every occasion when I was nearby repairing something.

Later during the winter our electric workshop was moved to the far end of the second machine hall where on the opposite side from us was parts testing department. We were lucky, because the day shift workers did all the moving of the equipment and the spare parts. It was much quieter here, because testing was done only during the day, and at night only special machines located in the first half of the hall were working.

After we settled down in the new place, we explored the equipment in the testing department and discovered that they had drills and lathes, a sink, and a water tank that had several heating elements; when the day shift was gone, the water tank was full of hot water. *Herr Weighelt* decided that we could put all of this to good use.

Once a week I began washing our work clothes in the sink with the hot water from the tank. I folded them neatly on the large heating pipes, where they dried to a perfect shape. *Herr Weighelt* found aluminum tubing somewhere and began to build a highchair for his baby boy. He was hiding his work on top of the high, wide storage unit. When it was finished, he carried a few pieces out of the factory at a time, hidden under

his overcoat. After that he built a baby carriage, leaving only the wheels to be found and attached at home in Berlin.

Soon after we moved to the new location, *Herr* Weighelt asked me, "Olga, do you know how to boil potatoes?"

"Of course. Why?"

"Tomorrow you will be cooking here," he told me, showing how the heating elements from the water tank could be used for this purpose. The next day he brought a pot, forks, salt, and a big bag of potatoes that he had bought from the local farmers. I washed the potatoes and placed them in a pot to cook with the skins on. *Herr* Weighelt switched on the heating unit. We hid the bag with the remaining potatoes high on the top shelf, where he was hiding all the parts of his aluminum tubing projects and where nobody from the day shift could find them.

"Those will be there for some other night when I don't have anything else to eat," he said. That night *Herr* Weighelt went to make all the repairs by himself, even to change the burned light bulbs, to allow me to watch the potatoes and to control the heat carefully so that we didn't make a mess in the parts testing department.

When he returned, he expected to eat just boiled potatoes with salt. Instead I mashed them in the pot to a fluffy puree, whipping them with the fork and adding some hot water and salt.

He asked me, "What is that?"

"This is the poor man's mashed potatoes," I told him jokingly. "There is no milk, or butter in them."

"Well, let's eat the 'poor man's mashed potatoes,'" he invited me.

We didn't have any plates and we both ate from the pot in which I had cooked the potatoes. We were both surprised at how good it tasted. The good quality potatoes deserved the compliments that *Herr* Weighelt made for my cooking skills. He said that I had to teach him how to make the "poor man's mashed potatoes," because he gave all of his coupons for butter, margarine, and milk to his wife and baby.

Sharing this simple meal, which we cooked clandestinely, made me respect this man even more; he treated me not only fairly, but also with impeccable correctness. And knowing that he was giving all his food coupons to his wife and child, while he didn't have much to eat, I thought how much he loved them.

One Saturday *Herr* Weighelt told me that he needed to remain in Berlin one more day and would come back for the Tuesday night shift. He said that on Monday night I would be working with Mischek. That Monday evening until midnight, everything was calm and nobody came to call us for repairs. After the midnight break I was napping in our shop and Mischek was sleeping in the compressor room. Suddenly the master of the first machine Hall arrived asking for *Herr* Weighelt. I told him that tonight I was working with Mischek.

"Where is he?" the master asked and explained, "I need him in a hurry. We are again without power. There was a sudden blowout in the second row. It must be a short circuit again somewhere."

He was an excellent master in the production of airplane parts, but, as *Herr* Weighelt had told me before, he didn't understand much about electricity and was afraid when someone touched the fuse board with 500-volts. He knew that I was not allowed to touch that board as an *Ostarbeiter* and told me to go and look for Mischek.

I went directly to the compressor room, which was locked from the inside. I knocked on the door and called Mischek, but the noise of the compressor was too loud and he couldn't hear me. I left word in the other halls that if someone saw Mischek to tell him to go immediately to the first machine hall. In about ten minutes I reported to the master that I couldn't find Mischek anywhere. I thought that it was better not to reveal where he was sleeping; at least that way he could invent some alibi.

The master was really upset, because he expected the head engineer would arrive any minute and he feared being blamed for not solving the problem. All the workers were very happy to have an extra break, and they accommodated themselves near the warm steam pipes and napped in the dark hall.

"It is impossible!" the outraged master was screaming. "Tomorrow I will report that damned pompous Polish electrician. I will show him, I will show him!..."

I was standing next to the fuse board with my workbasket full of fuses, ready if Mischek appeared. The minutes were passing by and there was no trace of him. I dared to ask the master, "Do you want me to change the fuses?"

"Are you joking?" he replied. "And if you make a bigger trouble?"

"Nothing else could happen, other than burning the fuse again," I answered and reminded him, "Don't you remember that I changed them when there was a short in the line and *Herr Weighelt* ordered me to do it?"

"Yes, I remember. But at that time he was responsible for you," he answered. Karel was standing nearby holding the ladder and said to the master, "I will hold the flashlight and watch her."

"Well, let's try it," said the master, still unsure if he was making the right decision. "Just be careful, for God's and for my sake."

"Well," I added, "I will be careful for my sake."

Karel placed the ladder securely and I climbed on with my wooden-soled clogs on my feet. They provided excellent insulation. I removed the burned main fuse first; then I inserted one at a time all the new fuses going to the individual rows of machines, except to the second row, which the master suspected had caused the problem. When I inserted the main fuse, it burned out at the same time we could hear a crackling sound and see sparks sprinkling from another row in the dark. Also the fuse of the third row was gone. I removed the third row fuse and put in the new main fuse. This time the power went on and light illuminated the hall. Karel smiled and complimented me. The master emitted a deep sigh of relief and said, "Well done! Good girl!"

I went to inspect the third row and found that the cable wires leading to the machine were hanging from the ceiling and their unprotected ends were on top of the machine. Several pieces of metal shavings were making a short between the two wires. Everything here was done in such a hurry that it was very easy to have the short circuits. I showed the problem to the master and insulated the wire ends. Then I advised him to order the day shift electricians tomorrow to check the machines in the second row where he suspected a problem.

After I returned to our workshop, in about an hour Mischek arrived with sleepy eyes and uncombed hair. As he was yawning he asked me, "Is everything all right?"

This time it was my turn to clean his nose. "No," I said. "There was a power failure in the first machine hall. The master was looking for you. I tried to wake you up, but the noise of the compressor was too loud and obviously you didn't hear me. The master

was very upset and finally allowed me to change the 500-volt fuses. Now, when you present yourself to the master, you'd better find a good excuse where have you been all this time."

Mischek washed his face, combed his hair and holding his head high left the workshop defiantly. He went first to his Polish friends in the third machine hall to ask them to cover up for him. The case, however, became more complicated than he had expected because in the morning the master had informed the head engineer about the incident; his friends from the third hall had saved Mischek only by swearing that he was in the far corner of the hall repairing a machine and for that reason had been hard to find.

In the morning the master also reported Mischek to Herr Fisher and to my surprise praised me, "I owe to Olga that we didn't stay half of the night without power. Under my supervision she changed all the fuses on the 500-volt fuse board and found the machine that caused the problem. I told her to leave the repairs on it for the day shift. I reported all this to the head engineer and he said that he knows that Olga is a smart girl and knows her job!"

"Sure, sure," *Herr Fischer* babbled, like he was afraid to say it loud and clear that I was a capable repair electrician. I was triumphant. He could not wrong me anymore.

After this incident I gained complete confidence and respect from all the machine hall masters, who no longer had any doubts about my skills as a repair electrician. What added more prestige, however, was that the head engineer, when he occasionally came to inspect the night shift, greeted me in the hall and sometimes stopped near the machine that I was repairing and talked with me for a few minutes.

My friendship with Karel was beginning to change into a mutual liking of each other. I liked when he tried to help me with the ladder, or with carrying the motors to our electrical repair shop. He was tall and strong; his fair-skinned face was adorned with full blond hair and was complemented by bright blue eyes and an open smile.

For some time his lamp was constantly giving him trouble and his lathe had problems with the switches. He was telling everyone that his machine was a veteran of the First World War and probably needed to be completely rebuilt. His requests for my help were becoming too obvious to *Herr Weighelt*. He told me not to overdo it with my visits to Karel, and I myself felt that I should not lose control of the situation. So I began to limit my extra visits to see him.

One evening I was called to the third machine hall to repair a machine for Alex, whom I also considered a good friend. After changing the fuse, we got involved in a political discussion in which his socialist views were on the opposite side of my anticommunist convictions. Then Alex changed the direction of our conversation. "I heard that there is more than friendship going on between you and Karel. How serious is it for you?"

"I don't know yet," I answered. "Why are you asking me about it?"

"You know that I am your friend."

"Yes, I believe you are."

"Well, as a friend I have a duty to warn you. I don't want you to be hurt."

"Come on, what do you want to tell me?" I urged him.

"Has Karel told you that he is married and has two children?"

"No, he does not talk about himself much."

"I thought so!" exclaimed Alex. "I didn't think that you would get involved with a married man."

"Thank you, Alex, now I know."

At that moment we saw Karel walking toward us. "Here you are!" he said cheerfully. "I went to the workshop and *Herr* Weighelt told me you were repairing Alex's machine."

Having finished with repairs I couldn't tell him that I was busy and I followed him to the first machine hall. In the courtyard he stopped me and asked gently, "Why didn't you come to see me tonight? What happened? Is it because of those silly comments that boys made that night? You shouldn't mind about them. I have always treated you with respect, never allowed any inappropriate word or action."

"It is all true," I answered. "But you should know why. I am afraid to fall in love with you and I am trying hard not to allow this to happen."

He took the shortcut to the hall through the big compressor room, where there was a narrow passage between the compressor and the wall. We had to stay close to each other and to raise our voices over the loud noise. When we were almost near the hall door, Karel put his hands on my shoulders and tried to kiss me.

"No! No!" I pushed him away. "You have a wife and two children! Please, let me go."

He remained still without saying a word. With my hands on his chest I was feeling the beating of his heart. I was longing for his kiss, but could not stop myself from telling him what I felt at that moment, "Please, let me go. With time we can become good friends as we were before."

Somebody opened the door and I quickly slipped into the machine hall and walked toward his machine. I gave a quick half-turn to the fuse, which Karel used to do to find an excuse to call me for repairs. Karel was looking sad, but he wasn't saying anything. I didn't want to reproach him anymore and there was nothing else to say. As I began to walk away I just said, "Good-bye, Karel."

"Good-bye," he answered.

The next week he changed to the day shift and I did not see him anymore, except on some Sundays in the camp. He was always polite and saluted me, but never stopped to talk to me. I thought that he really cared about me and behaved as a real gentleman by respecting my wishes. I regretted that what I imagined could have been a true love for which I was longing had to end so abruptly. But my reason was telling me that I made the right decision. My friend Tanya, whom I could see now only on Sundays, supported me wholeheartedly, saying that it was best to put an end to it before it was too late.

## A Letter From Uncle Igor

By Olga Gladky Verro

Spring was in the air. In the morning, after returning from the night shift, I was

sleeping on the top of my bunk bed and the sun was caressing me from the narrow window of our attic room. Usually I slept only until noon; then until five in the evening, washed our clothes, mended socks, or cleaned our tiny room. During good weather I liked to get outside and admire the beautiful view from the hill.

One of the German guards, a fat middle-aged man, had stopped to talk to me several times as I washed clothes in the wooden shack. He had asked me if I would like to help his daughter who had a bakery shop nearby to wash their clothes and to clean the house. I agreed and he told me to start the next Saturday.

It was a nice German family. Both husband and wife were short and fat, especially the husband, whose body resembled a large ball placed on short legs and his bald round head a smaller ball placed on top of the body. He was good-natured and more generous than his wife in giving me white rolls to eat before I would start to work. They asked me to come three times a week in the afternoon to clean the floors in the rooms, make beds by fluffing the goose down mattresses and comforters. I also had to shine their girls' shoes, which were always left on the little rug near the door where they changed them to slippers to be worn in the house.

The house was so clean that I almost had to make believe that I was cleaning it. The only thing that really needed to be done was to dust the floors and furniture from the thin veil of flour dust that was hard to prevent flying from the bakery and shop located next to the living quarters. After finishing with cleaning, I helped the girls who they came in from school had the chore of sorting out the bread coupons at the kitchen table.

On Saturday, however, it was a different story. I had to wash clothes in the basement, where they had a wringer machine that I had to turn by hand. Then I had to haul a big basket with the heavy load of wet clothes upstairs to the attic to hang them on the line. For my work I was given white bread to eat while I was there and also enough to take to camp for my mother and father.

Since working in any other place was prohibited for the *Ostarbeitern* from the camp, I could not ask *Lagerfuhrer* to give me passes to go out three times a week; I asked for it only for Saturdays. During the week I was sneaking out and in, while the German guard was looking the other way. Of course, it could not go on for a long time without being detected by Lyon'ka, who reported it to the *Lagerfuhrer*. One afternoon, while I was sitting with the girls sorting the bread coupons, the *Lagerfuhrer* suddenly arrived in the bakery and confronted the baker with having an unauthorized *Ostarbaiter* working for them. He ordered me to march with him back to the camp. My moonlighting adventure had ended abruptly.

From the time my mother had met Monsieur Demey in the infirmary, on some Sundays he had visited us in our small room in the attic. He didn't have anybody to speak French with and enjoyed talking with my mother and having political discussions with my father. He was working on a big dairy farm located not far from the town and, although he was a prisoner of war, as an officer of the French army the owners of the farm treated him very well and allowed him to have a pass to go out. When he visited us, he usually brought us some butter and farmers' cheese.

My mother also had another source of getting some extra food. One Byelorussian peasant woman heard about my mother's successful fortune-telling and she came one day to ask her to lay out the cards for her. She was also working on one

of the farms located in the hills surrounding the town. She used to bring us good farmers' bread and eggs and my mother visited her occasionally and bought bread from the farm owners, paying them with the occupation *Deutschemarks* brought with us from home.

When we arrived in Oelsnitz the first thing we did was write a letter and included our *Ostarbeitern* camp address, to Zoya Litvinova; Zoya had been working for more than a year in Germany in a factory located near the Belgian border. We had her address from her mother, Maria Sergejevna, who worked with my father in the printing house in Slavyansk. We had given Zoya's address to my uncle Igor before he and his family were evacuated to Germany together with the other *Volksdeutsche* families.

Zoya answered our letter immediately. She was surprised to find out that all three of us, were in Germany and was grateful for our giving her the news about her mother, who had remained in her home in Slavyansk. She wrote that she hadn't received any letters for us at her address, neither from my uncle, nor from my friend Sasha Boyko and that she wasn't receiving any more letters from her mother. She promised to mail us any letters and addresses immediately if she received them.

Sometime in late November 1943 I received a letter from my friend Boris Martens,<sup>1</sup> to whom I had written a letter as soon as we arrived in Oelsnitz. He wrote: "As I am writing this letter, my German battalion is stuck in the muddy fields of Rumania. It has rained almost continuously for several weeks and our uniforms got wet through to the bones. When we were stationed for a short time in a small town, I wanted to make a photo of myself to send you, but decided not to because my face was monstrous; it was covered with boils that I got from marching for a long time in cold weather and mud in wet shoes and clothing. It is a tough life being a German soldier. I hope that you have reached Germany safely. What happened to your father? Did you find him? Please answer me right away because I feel very lonely being away from you and from home. Love. Your friend Boris Martens."

Although I answered him immediately at his military address, I never had any reply from him. My best guess was that he was captured along with the other German soldiers by the Red Army and had become a prisoner of war. My worst guess was that he might have been killed. I have been left with tender memories of the young boy for whom I was his first love; but whom I could reciprocate only with genuine affection, as an older sister would feel for a younger brother.

By the end of January of 1944 Zoya forwarded a letter from my uncle Igor. It took a while for our let-ters to reach her and for her to mail his to us. Uncle Igor wrote that he was working as an electrical technician in the factory in Laband, a small town in the former Polish territory of *Oberschlesia*, which had been annexed to Germany. He wrote that all his family was fine and that they lived in a hamlet where the *Volksdeutsche* and many foreign workers lived with their families. We replied immediately to my uncle describing our life in the *Ostarbeitern* camp.

When Uncle found out about our living conditions, he mailed us the address of an organization headed by an old general of the White Russian Army, General Andrusov. This organization was authorized by the high Nazi authorities to find specialists in many fields, as qualified personnel for the war industry had been depleted when the German men were drafted. General Andrusov was helping Soviet intelligentsia refugees to be placed on the jobs according to their specializations. It was a streamlined procedure; all

that he needed was a letter from my father stating his and my special skills and the place and address where we were working. They would find the matching place where our skills were needed. Many times relatives and friends were giving a helping hand in finding those positions in the places where they worked, therefore reuniting the families. For us it was Igor who arranged with his supervisor, an electrical engineer at the factory, to write a request stating that they needed a mechanical draftsman and a chemist for the testing laboratory in their factory, and include my father's and my qualifications and address. General Andrusov did all the rest.

Once all the papers were in order it did not take long for us to receive an authorization for the transfer. It came as a surprise to the *Lagerfuhrer* and to the head engineer, because we were useful on the jobs at the Heinkel factory. But for the Germans an order from the higher authorities was not to be questioned. *Lagerfuhrer* ordered us on Saturday night to pack and be ready on the next Thursday, when an agent from the *Arbeitsamt* would come to accompany us to the new place of work. We couldn't believe that it was so easy to get out of that *Ostarbeitern* camp and be transferred to another place of work.

I was very sorry that *Herr Weighelt* was in Berlin on leave that whole week and I couldn't say good-bye to him. I left a short note for him, in which I wrote that I was grateful to him for being a righteous person and for treating me so well. And I wished him good luck with his family and little baby boy. I asked Natalia to give it to him. But I had time to see many of my friends and to say good-bye to them.

Hearing about my departure Tanya cried and asked me to write to her. We had a feeling, common to those days of war, that we would never see each other again. On Sunday I asked Marko to come with me for a walk in the hills overlooking the town to have a last look of the beautiful view in the company of a friend. He wished my father and me good luck in the new place.

On the morning of our departure I went to the kitchen to get my herb tea. I found Karel waiting for me. He came toward me and said, "I heard from my friends that you are transferred to another town. I don't want you to leave with bad memories about me. Please listen to my story. It is true that I am married. We had a small shop and lived happily as a family. Then came the Germans. My wife went to work in a German hospital as a nurse. After a few months the hospital moved to the front and my wife left me to be with a doctor whom she met there. My children are with my mother. I could not stand to remain in that town where everything reminded me of what happened. I enrolled as a volunteer to work in Germany. That's my story."

I couldn't find words to answer him and tears ran down my cheeks. Karel gently took my hand and said, "I hope you find the love and happiness you deserve. I will remember you always."

"I will write to you. Give me your home address," I asked, trying to hold on to this young man I had rejected without asking for an explanation.

"Don't be silly now. You did the right thing and I respect you for that." He was holding my hand between his large and warm hands and simply said, "Farewell, Olga."

"Farewell, Karel," I replied.

He quickly ran up the stairs without looking back.

My mother called me from the attic landing. It was time for us to come down with our belongings. The *Arbeitsamt* agent who came to accompany us was waiting in

the *Lagerfuhrer's* office. We walked with our pillowcase bags on our backs and the rest of our belongings in our hands to the railroad station and boarded the train going east. Our destination was Gleiwitz and Laband in *Oberschlesia*.

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1. See the chapter "Two Years Under the German Occupation."

## ***Presswerke Laband***

By Olga Gladky Verro

On the nineteen of May 1944 my father, mother, and I, accompanied by the placement agent from the *Arbeitsamt*, arrived at the station in Laband. Carrying our belongings—pillowcase backpacks, bundles, and bags—we had to walk from the railroad station directly to the *Presswerke*<sup>1</sup> Laband<sup>2</sup> factory. The placement agent, who was a local man, took shortcuts to arrive at the factory's main office building faster. It was a large multistory brick building with a facade and main entrance outside of the high fence encircling the whole factory site. At the left side of the building there was a gate and a guard booth.

The placement agent led us to the *Presswerke* employment office. A secretary greeted him and us and immediately announced our arrival to the office manager, whom we could see through the open door sitting at his desk.

The agent raised high right arm in the Nazi salute, "*Heil Hitler!*" and handed our transfer documents to the office manager and added, "Here are your new workers."

The manager took the papers with his left hand and keeping the elbow of his right hand on the desk slowly raised it saluting, "*Hail Hitler!*"

Without any other introduction, the placement agent stated, "All papers are in order. These people speak German well and can answer all your questions. They don't need my help anymore."

"*Danke schön*,<sup>3</sup> for bringing them here," replied the manager.

"We have all the paperwork about their transfer in our of-fice files. You are free to leave. *Heil Hitler!*"

The placement agent again raised his right arm in the Nazi salute, "*Heil Hitler!*" Then he turned toward the door where the three of us were standing and said, "*Auf wiedersehen!*" Without waiting to hear our answer he walked away.

The manager briefly inspected our papers and said, "*Herr Gladky, Frau Gladky, and Frauline Gladky, please remove your backpacks and sit down.*" We just looked at each other surprised to be treated so respectfully.

I answered quickly, "*Danke schön.*"

"I know your brother Igor Gladky, who works in the electrical department," the manager said to my father. "I placed him there several months ago. He is a *Volksdeutsche*. Why were you in the *Ostarbeitern* camp?"

I explained, "Because my uncle's wife is of German origin. We are Ukrainians."

"Well, you should remove all "OST" insignia from your clothing because you are not *Ostarbeitern* anymore. Here in the documents you are listed as foreign specialist workers and you will be treated as such from now on. As all workers in this category, you will live in the apartment in the workers' hamlet of Laband. Also, you will receive food ration coupons and will be paid weekly so you can buy your food and other necessities."

We were surprised to hear all of this, but sat silently and listened, being afraid that showing our emotions could somehow change his mind and not allow us some of the benefits that he promised.

"You, *Herr Gladky*," the manager continued, "are listed in the transfer papers as a chemist. You will work in the testing laboratory. You, *Frauline Gladky*, are listed as a mechanical draftsman and will work in the drafting office. And you, *Frau Gladky*, will not work in the factory. It states in your papers that you have some health problems, therefore, you will stay at home as a housewife."

Astonished, we listened without saying a word and couldn't believe that this was happening to us. The manager asked his secretary to call some other employees, who promptly appeared in the office. They took us to the other offices in the building, where my father and I received temporary factory passes and my mother a temporary identification card.

The employee instructed us to go to town as soon as possible, make the pass-size photographs, and bring them to the office to receive permanent foreign workers' passes.<sup>4</sup> He emphasized that we should always carry our passes, especially when we came to work; otherwise the guard at the factory gate would not admit us. Then in another office we were issued food ration coupons for the remaining days of May and were told that at the end of the month we would get coupons for the whole month of June.

When we returned to the employment office, the manager told another employee to show us where my father and I would be coming to work the next day. Since my mother didn't have a workers' pass, she waited for us in the office waiting room.

As we entered the gate, we were impressed with the size of the factory. Our guide was a very talkative person and he pointed to most of the buildings. On the left of the entrance gate there was a metal foundry, a huge building called *Ida Hot*. Behind it and running the length of the factory was a railroad yard. Farther, on the left was a large building with a high arched glass roof called *Machine Werkstatt* or machine workshop, where metal parts were tooled on various lathes, drills, grinders, and with hand tools on bench vices. Attached to the *Werkstatt* was a two-story brick building housing technical offices; the drafting office was located on the second floor. On the right side were several large buildings; one of them was the testing laboratory, and farther on was a large structure called *Ida Cold*, where huge metal presses to stamp parts from the sheet metal were located.

Our guide led us first to the testing laboratory and introduced my father to the laboratory manager as the new laboratory chemist assistant who would start to work

the next morning. Then he led us to the drafting office and introduced me to the head draftsman, who was very pleased that I spoke German.

When we returned to the employment office, the manager informed us, "In this Factory, as in all Germany, the standard wartime workday is twelve hours, Monday through Saturday. Your day shift is from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening and you should be in your place of work exactly on time. Now that you are all set for tomorrow at the factory, an employee from the housing office will accompany you to your apartment in the workers' hamlet of Laband." He got up from his chair and came to shake our hands, "*Frau Gladky, auf wiedersehen. Herr Gladky, auf wiedersehen. Frauline Gladky, auf wiedersehen.*"

We replied, "*Danke schön, Herr Manager, auf wiedersehen.*"

We placed our pillowcase backpacks on our backs, took the rest of our luggage in our hands, and followed the housing office employee. He told us, "Remember the way to the factory and, if you should forget, just follow the other workers or column of Russian or Italian prisoners of war who will be going to work at the same time." As we were walking, he oriented us, "This road to the right leads to the railroad station, the other one to the canal waterway. On the left is the old town of Laband, where most of the food shops, the bakery, and town offices are located."

When we came close to the huge barbed wire enclosed camp with the wooden barracks, as we passed the gate, he explained, "This is a *Kriegsgefangenenlager*, where all the prisoners of war, English, Russians and Italians are housed; and in one part of the camp some single foreign workers are living. All, except the English, work at the *Presswerke Laband*."

Right after the camp was the newly built workers' hamlet of Laband. There were many two-story red brick buildings that stood in parallel rows.

"We are almost there," said the housing office employee as we came closer to the U shaped block of seven buildings. Each building had three or four entrances. "Your apartment is in this block in the last building on the right."

The housing office employee entered the last entrance of the apartment building and went up the stairs to the second floor. On the landing were two doors. "This one on the left is your apartment," he said opening the door with the key.

We were greeted with the familiar smell of fresh straw. A small entrance hall had three doors. The door on the right was open to a long narrow room with one window. Two wooden beds topped with the standard straw-filled mattresses and pillows stood next to one wall, and near the window were a small table and two chairs.

"Two young men who should arrive in a few days will be living in this room," he said. "They will be sharing the kitchen and the bathroom with you."

He opened the door on the left. "This is the bathroom with the toilet, sink, shower, and water heater that provides hot water for the bathroom and for the kitchen."

Straight ahead was the third door; it was open and we entered a large kitchen with a big window on the left facing the front of the building. Next to the window was a table and four chairs; a big cooking range and the shelves were on the wall dividing it from the bathroom. The employee informed us, "In the basement there is some wood for starting the fire and plenty of coal for the stove."

On the right wall close to the kitchen entrance door was a door leading to a large room. There were three wooden beds topped with straw-filled mattresses and pillows, a

table, and three chairs. The large window faced the backyard, which was covered with wild grass. From the window one could see the rows of other apartment houses.

My father asked the housing office employee, "Do you know where my brother, Igor Gladky, and his family live?"

"I remember the name," he answered.

"He is a *Volksdeutsche*," clarified my father.

"Ah!" said the employee. "Come here near the window. Most of the *Volksdeutsche* live in the apartment buildings over there. If you go there, anyone could show you where he lives, because they all arrived from the Ukraine on the same train and know each other."

The employee went back into the kitchen and asked, "Well, do you have any questions about the apartment?"

We looked at each other, shaking our heads.

"Then I can leave. Here are the two sets of keys, one to the apartment and one to the basement." He handed the keys to my father and shook his hand, "*Auf wiedersehen, Herr Gladky.*"

"*Auf wiedersehen. Danke schön!*" said my father.

The employee saluted my mother and me by shaking our hands and we both thanked him for being so helpful and courteous to us.

Although my father was tired after the trip and all the walking from the station to the factory, across the factory yard and then to the apartment, he was impatient to find out where his brother lived. He asked my mother if she wanted to come right away to look for Igor's apartment.

"I am tired," replied my mother. "Go, you and Lyalya. I will find the bed sheets, pillowcases, and blankets to put on the beds and lie down for a while."

When we reached the *Volksdeutsche* apartment buildings, we saw some children playing on the sidewalk. As we approached them one of the boys grabbed the little girl's hand and ran toward us calling, "Lyalya! Lyalya!" Igor's adopted son Fredik recognized me, and he and his sister Nanochka began to jump around me. I put my arms around them and felt their little bodies clinging to me. They didn't recognize my father right away as he had changed so much after all the tribulations he had endured.

"Papa told us that you should arrive very soon," said Fredik and cautiously took his uncle by the hand. "Papa is not home yet. Mama and Babushka are home."

The children led us to their apartment, which was on the ground floor. "Mama, mama," called Nanochka, "they have arrived!" Antonina Yulyevna and her mother, whom we all called Babushka, greeted us with affection.

We wanted to know at once everything that had happened to them from the day of their evacuation with the other *Volksdeutsche* from Slavyansk. They wanted to know how we had managed to get my father out of the German Gestapo concentration camp.

Babushka went to the kitchen to start cooking the supper and asked her daughter, "Should I make more soup enough for everybody?"

"Yes, yes, Mama," replied Antonina Yulyevna, and told us that we were invited at six-thirty for supper, which we accepted promptly. I suggested to my father that it was better for him to go back to our apartment and to rest until that time, explaining to my aunt that he was very tired. My aunt told Fredik and Nanochka to accompany us so that they would know where we live. On our way back the children chirped like little birds,

telling us about their life in the new place.

When we returned for the supper, Uncle Igor was already home. It was a very sentimental reunion of the two brothers, who only a few months ago didn't have any hope of seeing each other again in their lifetime. They exclaimed together as they embraced each other repeating several times their endearing names.

"*Rostik*, my dear brother!"

"*Igorek*, my little brother."

Antonina Yulyevna invited everybody to the table and all began questioning each other about what had happened in this short time; we frequently interrupted one another asking for more details.

My uncle Igor told us, "Our evacuation with all other *Volksdeutsche* families from Slavyansk went smoothly and orderly as only the Germans can organize. Except for the furniture, we were allowed to take all our clothes, bedding and linen, and also a limited number of kitchen utensils."

"I also took with me my hand-operated sewing machine," my aunt added proudly about her prized possession. "And we were advised to take potties for the children because the train would stop for bathroom facilities only in big stations. We were also told to take all the nonperishable food we had and as much ready-to-eat food that we would need for about two weeks. Each family was given enough bread to last for a week."

"Although we traveled in the freight cars," my uncle continued, "there was sufficient space for each family to be able to sleep comfortably on the floor covered with straw."

At the beginning of our trip the train stopped several times in the large stations, where other cars with *Volksdeutsche* families were added to the convoy, and we received hot tea and could use the bathroom facilities. When we crossed the border of Poland we went through the sanitary checking point, and after that they moved us to another train traveling on the narrower European railroad tracks, and the train began to travel faster."

"And we were given hot soup and tea every day," added my aunt.

"The whole convoy of *Volksdeutsche* families from Ukraine arrived in *Oberschlesia*," my uncle explained. "After the interviews with the *Arbeitsamt* agents the families were assigned to the various towns, and many of the Slavyansk families were brought here to Laband where lots of workers were needed for the *Presswerke*."

When we recounted the whole story about my father's escape from the German Gestapo concentration camp near Makheyevka and our departure on the last convoy train for conscripted workers from Stalino to Germany, Igor was surprised to hear that we had received help in accomplishing it from the three very respectable and loyal German officers. Igor knew one of them very well, *Herr Hahn*, the chief of the *Arbeitsamt* in Slavyansk. He couldn't believe that the *Lagerfuhrer* of the regional conscripted workers camp in the city of Stalino and his friend the supply officer at the Gestapo headquarters in Stalino helped us to find and save my father.<sup>5</sup>

Igor couldn't believe that all that happened to his brother were only coincidences—the escape from the Gestapo concentration camp and the right timing of our arrival in Stalino at the last moment before the departure of the convoy train. "It is incredible!" he exclaimed. "The *Lagerfuhrer* knew that Orest had escaped from the

Gestapo concentration camp and he put him on the train without any questions asked! I still think that it's unbelievable!"

I answered, "Unbelievable, but all true!"

Babushka served the simple supper, which for us seemed to be a feast. The homemade potato soup with dumplings and a condiment of sautéed onions tasted so good and we ate with such appetite that Babushka offered us second helpings. For the occasion she also baked some simple cookies that the children and we appreciated very much.

It was so much to tell that we talked and talked, forgetting that tomorrow we had to get up early to be at the factory before six o'clock in the morning. Antonina Yulyevna told my mother that tomorrow she would go with her into town and show her where all the shops and the bakery were located. Igor told my father that tomorrow morning he would come by our apartment and we would go to the factory together.

The next morning my father woke me up early to be on time for work. For lunch my mother gave us the leftover breakfast bread that had been given to us for the trip. We waited for Igor near our apartment building and, as we were walking to the factory, we told him details of our story that we hadn't finish telling him the night before.

On our way we passed the column of Soviet prisoners of war who were being led to the factory by German guards with guns across their shoulders. I said, "That's how we were marching to work as the *Ostarbaitern*." It was the first time since we were in Germany that we saw the Soviet prisoners of war. They walked slowly, dragging their feet with difficulty. Their discolored and worn-out uniforms were loosely hanging on them; their shoes were wrapped with rags to keep them from falling apart. Igor commented with sympathy, "Those are our young men. They are working on the worst jobs, unloading coal from the freight cars, and loading it into the hot furnaces."

"I can't understand," I replied in disbelief, "why Germans are treating them so unfairly. Many of them surrendered hoping that the Germans were liberating them from the communists. Instead the Germans are creating enemies from those who could have been their friends. Besides, they need specialists everywhere in their war industry. Why don't they use the prisoners' talents and put them to work where they can be more useful?!"

"There are many things that we cannot understand about the German policies during wartime," Uncle Igor replied. "But, you better be careful and keep such opinions to yourself if you don't want to put your and my family under suspicion. There is a war going on and you better remember it!"

We arrived at the gates of *Presswerke* and our discussion ended. My father turned to the right to go to the testing laboratory. Igor and I turned to the left where our places of work were in the same building; his electrical department was on the ground floor and my drafting office was on the first floor. My uncle promised to come and visit me during lunchtime to see how I was doing.

The drafting office was a very large and well-lighted room with many big windows. Next to the windows were many rows of tables, desks, and drawing boards. Almost half of the wall without windows was taken up by a tall and wide multi-drawer cabinet for flat storage of large sheets of drafting paper and finished drawings. On the shorter wall next to the entrance door there was blueprint-processing equipment consisting of the light-exposure unit, and a large unit for ammonium blueprint

developing. On each table and in the drawers were drafting tools and accessories.

The German head draftsman was a soft-spoken middle-age man. He introduced me to the two young Polish draftsmen. Later I found out that they lived with their families in the nearby towns and traveled to work by the streetcars early in the morning. They spoke perfect German with an *Oberschlesian* accent.

The head draftsman was glad that I also could speak, read, and write German—it did simplify communications in the office. He also was glad that I had a college mechanical drafting course that was helpful in shortening the time needed for my training. He told me that for a couple of days I should study the old drawings to get acquainted with the standard German mechanical drafting techniques and symbols, and he suggested that I watch the other draftsmen as they executed their assignments.

At that time the major work at the *Presswerke Laband* was to make custom made metal parts needed for repairs and substitution of damaged components for German industrial and military machinery and weapons. The damaged parts were shipped to the factory and the drafting office was in charge of preparing working drawings for the various operations in reproducing the items. Some parts needed to be cast first from the hot metal in the foundry, Ida Hot Hall; some needed to be stamped on the stamping machines from the sheet metal in Ida Cold Hall, and some had to be shaped from special metal alloys on the lathes, milling machines, and drills in the *Werkstatt shop*.

In the beginning I only helped the other draftsmen to finish their assignments. They made the original drawings in pencil on the drafting paper; I copied them in India ink on the parchment paper and then made several blueprints copies to be sent to the various departments for production. Occasionally I would go with one draftsman to the Ida Hot foundry to help him take the measurements for the large items that couldn't be brought to the drafting office. He would then make a sketch and prepare working drawings for the substitute item that needed to be cast.

This served as good training for me to learn all the details before beginning to work independently. In fact, as soon as the head draftsman considered that I was ready, he began to give me complete assignments to draft the easier items, allowing the more experienced draftsmen to concentrate on more complicated ones. By that time he told us that he was expecting a new draftswoman to arrive to work in our drafting office soon.

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1. *Presswerke Laband g.m.b.h.* - name of the factory in German.

2. Small town and a workers hamlet near the city of Gleiwitz, *Oberschlesia* (German spelling of name of the town and the region. It was annexed by Germany from Poland in the beginning of World War II).

3. "Thank you very much." [in German].

4. From the copy of Orest Gladky document *Presswerke Laband Beschäftigungsbescheinigung* – ID and work pass to the factory.

5. See the chapters "Leaving Our Home," and "The Escape."

## Meeting the Italian Prisoners of War

By Olga Gladky Verro

Sometime at the end of June 1944 a new draftswoman came to work in the drafting office where I worked at the *Presswerke Laband* factory.<sup>1</sup> She presented herself as *Frau*<sup>2</sup> Maria, making deliberate emphasis on the word "*Frau*." Maybe she wanted it to stand out and to give the importance that she was a *Volksdeutsche*, or maybe she felt that it was more respectable than being called simply by her first name, Maria. But she definitely didn't want to be called by her last name, Alexandrova, which sounded too Slavic for a *Volksdeutsche*.

She arrived to Germany from the city of Kharkov.<sup>3</sup> Although she was about ten years younger than my mother and there was a great difference in my and her age, we almost instantly became very good friends. She was a widow; her only son was drafted in the Red Army at the beginning of the war and she hadn't heard from him since then. She feared that he had been killed in the first waves sent to slaughter by the Red Army generals who were trying to stop the advance of the German tanks and airplanes with the bodies of the young men.

*Frau* Maria had many years of experience in architectural drafting, but she was less familiar with mechanical drafting techniques and standards. When she began to work in the mechanical drafting office she was afraid to make mistakes and to be held accountable for them. Therefore, the master draftsman assigned her to do the work that I had been doing before she arrived, to copy the drawings made by the other draftsmen on the parchment paper in India ink and then to make blueprint copies to be sent to the various production departments.

While *Frau* Maria was waiting for an apartment in the workers' hamlet of Laband, she lived in the women's section of the camp for single foreign workers, mostly Polish and French. That part of the camp was separated from the section of Italian prisoners of war only with the high double barbwire fencing.

It was summer and the darkness was not descending until late in the evening. This gave the young women and the young Italian men a few hours to rest outside their barracks after their twelve hours of work in the factory. The young men and women did not need to speak a common language to show their interest in each other. Protected by the security of the fence, the young women were flirting with the young Italians, who were very inventive in telling and showing with gestures their admiration of the women.

Although *Frau* Maria was not in her prime—she was probably in her early forties—she was very attractive woman. She was slender and had a well-proportioned figure. And she resembled more the Mediterranean type than the Arian race. She had long wavy dark brown hair that was combed back and held in a soft chignon; her brown eyes and well-outlined eyebrows complemented her classical facial features. No wonder she found an Italian admirer right away who just happened to be older than his compatriots.

*Frau* Maria confided to me about her conquest, but she confessed that she was not as enthusiastic about her Italian admirer as he was about her. "There are two or three other young Italian men who are much more attractive and distinguished than he is," she told me. "I see them every morning on my way to the factory. They march proudly at the head of the column, full of youthful spirit and singing Italian songs. They

are always neatly shaved, wearing clean white shirts with the unbuttoned collars spread outside of their blue uniforms." And she added with regret, "If I was only a few years younger, I would have never allowed them to escape from my charms!"

I was intrigued by her almost passionate description of these young Italian men and told her, "I am curious to see at least one of these young men to find out for myself if they are really so attractive, or if it is only your vivid imagination."

"It is very easy to see them," she answered. "I saw that two of them are working in the telephone repair workshop right up the stairs in the *Werkstatt* Hall next door. All you have to do is find a good excuse to visit the workshop."

I promptly suggested, "You mean, like asking them to repair something for us." Then remembering the tricks that the young men used at the Heinkel<sup>4</sup> factory to see me, I added, "Let's disconnect the telephone!"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed *Frau* Maria. "It is not safe. What would happen if somebody found out that we did it? Besides, we never answer the telephone. The head draftsman might just go himself to call them instead of sending one of us. Let's find some small tool that you could take there for repairs."

During the lunchtime we searched in all the desk drawers and *Frau* Maria found an old ruler-pen that had a small nick on its point. "Here," she said, "tell them that it fell on the floor and ask them to file it a little to make it work."

It was close to the end of the lunch break when I went to see those young Italian men that *Frau* Maria liked so much... As I exited the main entrance door of our building I saw a small group of Soviet prisoners of war busying themselves near the mess-drum left outside after lunch had been distributed to the Italian prisoners of war. With their bare hands they were scooping out the remnants of the gluey soup that remained attached to the walls and the bottom of the drum and licking it avidly from their dirty hands. I thought that they resembled hungry animals attacking their prey. And then immediately I felt ashamed for making such an undeserved comparison of my unfortunate compatriots, who were poor victims of the war and forced by hunger to behave like this. But most of all, I felt ashamed of the Germans who were treating the men who worked for them like animals.

These men probably surrendered without fighting because they, as many other Soviet citizens, believed that the Germans were their liberators from the communist oppression. Instead, their captors treated them worse than animals. The men were so absorbed in satisfying their hunger that they paid no attention to me as I walked by in a hurry and entered the *Werkstatt* door.

The telephone repair workshop was high under the roof on a structure similar to a balcony on the left side of the *Werkstatt* hall wall. To reach the stairs leading to the workshop I had to walk across the whole length of the *Werkstatt*. It was usually a noisy place, humming with the motors' noise and the squeaking sounds of metal being shaved, bored, or milled on the machines. But toward the end of the lunch break it was completely quiet. The sound of my footsteps on the concrete floor reverberated from the high metal beams and glass roof and I switched to tiptoeing so I would not interfere with the sanctity of the silence. After six hours of work and a scanty meal tired workers were sleeping or napping wherever they could find a comfortable place to sit or to lie down—they needed to rest before resuming another six hours of standing on their feet working on the machines.

As I began to climb the steep steps leading to the telephone repair workshop, the deep sound of the chimney from the Ida Hot foundry announced the end of the lunch break and the *Werkstatt* began to awake from the silence.

I knocked and slightly opened the door of the telephone workshop, asking in German, "May I come in?"

"Ya, ya," I heard the answer.

"*Guten Tag!*" I greeted in German, entering the room.

"*Guten Tag!*" answered the man sitting at the table on the right of the door. He asked me in German but with a strong French accent, "What we can do for you, *Frauline?*"

I thought, "This one is a Frenchman and he is not very young." I gave a quick look around the room. On the left side of the room two young men in the blue uniforms with white collars of their shirts neatly spread out were sitting at the bench. I thought, "Good, the Italians are here." I handed the Frenchman the ruler-pen and said, "I work in the drafting office. This ruler-pen fell on the floor and it smears the ink. Do you have a very fine file to remove a small nick on its point?"

The Frenchman touched the point of the pen and called in French, "Hey, Giulio, come here!"

One young Italian came to the table. The Frenchman handed him the ruler-pen and asked in French, "Can you file this nick to make this pen work properly?"

Giulio carefully inspected the point of the pen and answered in French, "I believe it is possible, but it will take some time to do it right." He inspected the tool again and told the Frenchman, "Emile, could you tell *Mademoiselle* that I will try to do it by tomorrow."

The other young Italian also came to see what was going on, but he just observed without getting involved. However, it gave me a chance to see both Italians up close. "Frau Maria has good taste," I thought. "Both young men are quite handsome." I didn't want to be too obvious looking at them, but I saw that both of them were skinny and undernourished. Giulio had a more classical shaped face, while the other Italian had a rounder face and more prominent cheekbones.

Meanwhile Giulio added in French, "Emile, please ask *Mademoiselle* to bring a bottle of India ink. I shall need it to test how the pen is working."

Since I could understand French a little, I was listening attentively to Giulio and, before Emile had a chance to translate it for me in German, I replied, "*Tres bien, Monsieur.*"<sup>5</sup>

Surprised to hear my answer in French, Emile asked, "*Parle Vous Frances, Mademoiselle?*"<sup>6</sup>

"*Un peau,*"<sup>7</sup> I replied showing with my thumb and forefinger the conventional way to indicate a small amount and then explained in German, "My mother tries to teach me French just in case we might need it, if after the war we could immigrate to France."

"Your mother speaks French?" wondered Emile.

"Yes," I explained, "she used to be a teacher of French in the old days in Russia."

"Then you are Russian?" asked Emile.

And, when I told him that I was from the Soviet Ukraine, he translated all our conversation to the Italians in French.

Giulio said, "I am very interested to know more about the life in the Soviet Union."

"Well," I replied, "if you would allow me to come here once in a while during the lunch break to practice my French with you, I will tell you what you want to know about the life under the communists."

Emile had noticed Giulio's interest and asked him jokingly, "Giulio, what do you think, should we allow *Mademoiselle* to come here to practice speaking French with us?"

"*Oui, oui*,"<sup>8</sup> answered Giulio with a smile, "tell her to come here and we will tutor her in French conversation."

Emile translated it for me in German and, when I agreed, he asked me, "What is your name, *Mademoiselle*?"

"Olga."

He got up from his chair and with a theatrical gesture made a presentation, "*Mademoiselle* Olga, I am Emile, this is Giulio, and this is Bruno."

"Very pleased to meet you," I replied.

"Giulio, meet your student, *Mademoiselle* Olga," Emile presented me in the same theatrical manner.

Smiling, Giulio bowed his head, "*Mademoiselle* Olga, you found yourself a tutor of French."

I also smiled and bowed my head.

"I shall be here to supervise your lessons and to chaperone you," Emile added jokingly with a wink.

At that moment we heard someone climbing the squeaky stairs. Both Giulio and Bruno quickly retreated to their places at the bench and grabbed the screwdrivers, making believe that they were working on the disassembled telephone. I felt that it was the right moment for me to leave and said to Emile, "I will bring India ink tomorrow. *Au revoir*!"<sup>9</sup> and I quickly exited.

At the bottom of the stairs I saw another young Italian who was busy taking care of the accumulators. I had seen him several times in the electric workshop, where I occasionally visited my uncle. He was an attractive young man and I liked him, but he was very shy even about answering my greetings. The only way I knew that he was saluting me was to see his hand slightly waving in my direction, which he also did this time when I saluted him in passing by.

*Frau* Maria was waiting for me, anxious to hear my opinion about the young Italians. She bombarded me with her questions, "You have been there a long time. Were they there? Did you see them? Was I right telling you that they are very attractive young men?"

I interrupted her, trying to intrigue her with anticipation of some unexpected mysterious secret, "Wait until I tell you what happened there."

"What, what happened? Tell me, please," supplicated *Frau* Maria.

"It is too long to tell you all right now. I shall tell you on our way home."

"You mean that you will make me wait until six o'clock to hear your story?" protested *Frau* Maria. "The head draftsman is not here yet. Quickly tell me everything before he returns."

I couldn't keep myself silent any longer and told her what happened in the telephone workshop.

After listening to my story, *Frau* Maria exclaimed, "Olga, it is wonderful!" She was so excited, almost as if she had been in my place.

On our way home she continued to ask me to repeat over and over all the details about my visit to the telephone workshop. And she counseled me, "Now, you have to start seriously to learn French, so you can have an excuse to visit and talk to this Giulio. You don't want to miss the chance to flirt with him."

"*Frau* Maria, he is a handsome and polite young man; he has a nice smile and very pleasant voice that sounds so sweet in French. But I don't even know if I would like him," I replied. "Besides he was interested in learning about life in the Soviet Union; he was not interested in me."

"Olga, you are naive," she replied, and insisted on giving me advice. "He is interested in talking with you. It is a good beginning. It will give him and you a chance to know each other. There is no harm in this. Believe me, he is not different from other Italian young men in the camp; they all like the company of the young women. I can see them every evening across the barbwire fence as they try to get the attention of the women in the Lager."

"Well," I said, "I had many young men who were my friends at the Heinkel factory and I enjoyed talking with them and they also enjoyed my company. You are right, I am also curious to know this young Italian better and it might be fun to talk to him after all."

We reached the camp entrance and said "Good-bye."

As I arrived in our apartment, I told my mother, "Let's resume my French lessons tonight."

Surprised by such a sudden change in my attitude toward the lessons, which I had done leisurely before, my mother asked, "What happened to change your mind?"

"Well, today I met one Frenchman and one Italian who speaks French and I can practice with them what I learn with you."

"I am glad," she said. "It doesn't matter what the reason is, as long as you learn another language that might be useful in the near future."

From that evening I diligently began to study French.

The next day at the end of the lunch break I went to the telephone workshop and, as I entered, I greeted in French, "*Bonjour*,<sup>10</sup> *Monsieur* Emile! *Bonjour Monsieur* Giulio! *Bonjour, Monsieur* Bruno!"

This time there were two other men in the Workshop and I greeted them in German, "*Guten Tag*!"<sup>11</sup>

I gave the India ink and a piece of parchment paper to Giulio and he tried to draw a line with the ruler-pen but it smeared the ink. He asked Emile to interpret for me in German that he would work on it some more and that I should come back tomorrow. Then we talked some French.

In the following weeks I was coming about two to three times a week at the end of the lunch break for practicing conversations in French with Giulio. As my knowledge of French progressed, we needed less and less of Emile's translating. However, my French was not yet sufficient to answer all Giulio's questions about the life in the Soviet Union. To do this we had to use Emile as a translator.

In the absence of the German workers in the workshop, Emile, who believed in socialism, often disagreed with my anti-Soviet statements, which at first I defended with conviction. Then I decided that it was not worth it to antagonize him when he, as a French expert, participated in my conversations with Giulio; besides that, he was making my visits appear more proper in the eyes of the other coworkers.

Shortly after I met Giulio and began to visit him in the telephone workshop *Frau* Maria got an apartment in the workers' hamlet of Laband—only two apartment houses across the street from me—and we continued to walk together to and from the factory. I asked her advice on how I could show my appreciation to Giulio for his tutoring me in French.

"Do you think he would be offended if I brought him some food?" I asked her. "I know that the Italian prisoners of war are receiving the kind of food not much different from what we were given at the Ostarbaitern camp."

"Of course, he would be happy to have some food," she approved. "Ask your mother to find some food that she could buy without food coupons."

Indeed, my mother found that she could buy pork blood sausages and she cooked them with fried onions and made a nutritious *pâté*. I put it in the brown enameled cup that we brought from home and carried it in a small paper bag. The first time, I brought it to the telephone workshop and placed it casually on Giulio's bench and whispered to him, "It is for you. Please, return the cup."

The next time I came, he told me, "I shared it with my friend Bruno. It was delicious. Was it pork blood sausage?"

I hesitated to answer.

"Bruno recognized it. His parents have a delicatessen shop and sell them."

Then I admitted, "Yes. It's very nutritious. My mother found that she could buy it without food coupons. Do you want her to make it for you when she finds it again?"

"Oh, yes, please. And tell your mother that we are very grateful. But next time don't bring it here. You are not allowed to give us food. We will arrange a casual encounter somewhere in the *Werkstatt* for this."

Several times after that I took them food and Bruno or Giulio came down to the entrance of the *Werkstatt* where I would give them a package. Later my mother bought, without coupons, the jars of marinated snails from France; the Germans were not used to eating them, but it was a real treat for the Italians.

Every time I returned to our drafting office from my visits to the telephone workshop, *Frau* Maria was impatient to hear what I talked about with Giulio that day and flooded me with questions. "Was Giulio waiting for you?" "How did he look at you?" "Does he show any signs that he likes you?"

"*Frau* Maria!" I would answer her with reproach. "I am never alone with him. His friend Bruno and Emile are always there and sometimes the German and Polish workers too. All I can tell you is that my French is improving thanks to Giulio and Emile. Also, Giulio is very curious about the life under the communists and asks many questions about my family. He has very good manners and behaves like a real gentleman. I think he is pleased to be with me, probably because it breaks up the monotony of the twelve hours in the workshop. But I feel that we are becoming good friends and that I am becoming very fond of him."

*Frau* Maria interrupted me. "Then you should show him that you are interested in him, and not only in the French conversations. You should show him that you like him as a man, not as a tutor." And with the wisdom of an experienced woman *Frau* Maria explained to me, "Most men need some encouragement by the woman. If I was in your place, by this time I would have already conquered his heart and soul!"

"Listen, I am very happy now to consider Giulio just as my good friend. I am afraid

to show too much interest in him as a man before he shows his interest in me as a girl, and not just as a person with whom he can talk about the Soviet Union."

But *Frau* Maria disagreed with me and insisted that I should nurture Giulio's interest in me, instead of passively waiting for it. "You should not leave it to chance alone," she insisted.

I told her that I disagreed with her approach and preferred to patiently wait and enjoy his company for now.

"You are too passive," she told me shaking her head. But I disappointed her by replying that I would not follow her advice.

Then at the end of August 1944 the status of the Italian prisoners of war suddenly was changed to foreign workers.<sup>12</sup> This event made it possible for *Frau* Maria and me to know better the two Italian men that we were interested in.

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1. See the chapter "*Presswerke* Laband."

2. Mrs. [in German].

3. The capital of Kharkovsky Province in the Eastern Ukraine.

4. See the chapter "The Remnants of the Heinkel Aircraft Factory in Oelsnitz."

5. "Very well, Mister." [in French].

6. "Do you speak French, Miss?" [in French].

7. "A little." [in French].

8. "Yes, yes" [in French].

9. "Good bye!" [in French].

10. "Good day, Mister..." [in French].

11. "Good day!" [in German].

12. See the chapters "Italian Armistice" and "The Prince of My Dreams."

## **Part Nine**

### **The Italian Prisoner Of War**



# The Village Of Asciano

By Olga Gladky Verro

From Aldo Tratzi, *Asciano E La Sua Storia*

And from Paolo Pieracci, "Franchini's Family Tree"

The ancestry of Giulio Verro can be traced to the small village of Asciano, located about twenty kilometers from the Ligurian Sea near the ancient city of Pisa on the western coast of central Italy in the Tuscany region. The village of Asciano is situated on the slopes and descends down to the base of Mount Pisano, which divides the two valleys, the Valley of Pisa and the Valley of Lucca. Mount Pisano makes a part of the range of Pisani Mountains that are among the oldest mountains of Italy going back to the Carboniferous period.

The presence of humans on the territory of Asciano goes back to the most ancient times. Recent local archeological finds in several Mount Pisano ancient caves trace it back 300,000 years. Historical information is available about the people that lived in this geographical area from about 5,000 B.C. to the Roman period. Between the 9th and 4th centuries B.C. it was populated by the Etruscans, who inhabited a large area extending from this region to the north, south, and east across the Apennine Mountains to the Adriatic Sea. The Etruscans had an advanced culture, which influenced the economy of the region and its cultural life. They developed commerce, navigation, and architecture; they are credited with the invention of the arch in construction and with the anchor for ships.<sup>1</sup>

They lived in comfortable houses and loved the pleasures of life. Social life of the rich included banquets accompanied with music and dance; and for the rich and poor there were public games, dances, and singing. From the Etruscan period, in which the town of Pisa had its origins, the life of the people who lived on the territory where the present village of Asciano is located remained closely connected to the history of Pisa. However, there are no direct historical records about the life and people in the village of Asciano during the Etruscan period.

One of the great changes in the life of people living in that location, as documented in the history of the region, occurred about 180 B.C. when the Romans took over the Etruscan territory. As was customary in the Roman Empire, the veterans of the Roman legions received large parcels of land for their services and settled there with their families, slaves, and animals. Near these properties in the Pisani Mountains villages were formed taking their names from their owners. Thus the village of Asciano took the name from its Roman owner, Axianus. During the Roman period village life was economically dependent on serving the needs of the owner of the land and, besides the peasants attending to the agricultural needs, there were those who practiced various trades needed for the maintenance of the property.<sup>2</sup>

After the fall of the Roman Empire one historical record attributes to the village of Asciano great importance for a castle located on the slope of Mount Pisano, because it served as the defense of Pisa from invaders. No traces of this castle are remaining,

but the villagers refer to the place where it stood by the name Castellvecchio, which means the "old castle." During the Middle Ages this castle had seen many battles between the Pisans and invaders from neighboring city-states.<sup>3</sup>

During the first centuries of the Middle Ages the houses, even those of the rich, were very modest. They were constructed from wood and had only one story. The roofs were made of straw, reeds, tree branches, or small oak boards. The windows were small narrow openings that could be closed with wooden shutters. Only the churches and some monasteries had windows with glass, which was a rare and expensive material in those days. At night the light of the fireside was used for illumination and later a wick-lamp burning animal or vegetable fat was used. The furnishings in the peasants' houses consisted of a table and benches or stools in the kitchen placed near the fireside and a large wooden case full of straw sometimes covered with a blanket to serve as a bed. It was common to go to sleep soon in the evening and to rise early so one could use as much daylight as possible.

After the fall of the Roman Empire numerous Barbarian invasions swept away fundamental principles on which the Latin society was functioning, leaving the people in that region in a dark period of history. Population of Asciano and neighboring villages was brutalized by invaders, suffered plunders, rapes, and atrocities; it was decimated by epidemics, including long periods of pestilence, and devastated by floods. Population of the whole region plunged into misery, famine, and heavy manual work that was needed for survival.

Notwithstanding all these natural calamities and man-inflicted adversities the population of Asciano experienced slow but steady growth through the centuries, influenced by the proximity of the important city of Pisa. The census of 1833 shows the population of Asciano as 1,369, the largest among the neighboring villages located in the Pisani Mountains.

It took a long time for the Christian church to overcome the indifference and apathy of the coarse and passive peasants to the teachings of Christianity. The functions of the priests in those days were limited to baptisms, marriages, funerals, and Sunday Mass in Latin, which the peasants could not understand. The parishes in that region began to keep registers of the baptized only in 1458. Some parishes were poor and were left for long periods without priests, and wandering friars often performed religious functions. Mount Pisano and the neighboring mountains were the preferred places for the monasteries. One historical record notes that at the end of the IV Century the famous Saint Augustine, during his travels to Rome, stayed for several months in the monastery at Mount Pisano, where he founded the order of the Eremite Friars.

The records show that the first parish called Pieve di San Giovanni Battista already existed in the village of Asciano in the year 1150; and another small but well known church of San Rocco was erected by the people of Asciano to commemorate the saint who, according to the peasants' legend, in his passing through the village helped those afflicted by pestilence. The population of Asciano commemorates San Rocco on the 16th of August with grand festivities.<sup>4</sup>

Asciano was already famous in 1286 in the Republic of Pisa for its natural spring waters and its washerwomen, who were under Pisa's tutorship. Later Asciano acquired great importance for its pure spring water that was perfect for drinking. Several projects were attempted to bring the water to the city of Pisa, first by Cosimo I de Medici in the

1500s, and later by his son Grandduke Ferdinand I, who began in 1588 to erect the aqueduct which was not completed until 1613 by his son Cosimo II. The Medici's aqueduct, elevated over pilasters connected by arches, extends for six kilometers from Asciano to the walls of Pisa. Its remnants are preserved today as a historical monument.<sup>5</sup>

Asciano has several large villas dating from 1400 to 1800, constructed and remodeled through the years. These villas were owned by noble and rich families who passed them to their heirs, or resold to other families of the same social status. One of these, Villa Scerni, has to be mentioned because the owners allowed a part of it for many years to be inhabited by the nuns of the order of Cottolengo; there until 1941, they conducted a kindergarten for the children of Asciano.<sup>6</sup>

Asciano has three village squares. The oldest one dates to 1820 and was dedicated in 1889 to Giuseppe Garibaldi, the well-known Italian patriot who helped to unify Italy. In 1946 it was renamed the Square of the Republic when the population of Italy voted to become a republic from the previous Kingdom of Italy. On both sides of this square were old horse chestnut trees and in front was the old elementary school. This square was a place where the villagers assembled to socialize and to sit in the hot summer days under the shade of the old trees, sipping cold drinks sold from a wooden kiosk. Another smaller square, the Square of the Remembrance, is dedicated to the village soldiers fallen in WWI and WWII. The third square inaugurated in 1989 was dedicated to the village's washerwomen, a trade practiced by the women of Asciano long before 1286 until the use of washing machines in the last decades of the 1900s made this trade obsolete.<sup>7</sup>

Until the 1920s, when the electric light was introduced in Asciano, strategic points on the streets of the village were illuminated by petroleum and later by acetylene lights. In 1872 a musical band was founded in Asciano that had forty-five instruments. It was an important group, providing entertainment and contributing to the social and cultural life of the village until the middle of the 1950's.

From ancient times until the beginning of the 1900s the road to Pisa was an unpaved road and there was no public transportation. To get to Pisa the villagers had to walk; to transport materials they used carts pulled by horses or donkeys. On Mondays the road had a procession of washerwomen using hand-pulled carts to bring the clothes to be washed from Pisa to Asciano, and on Saturdays, to take the clean clothes back to the city.

Until 1920 the use of a bicycle was considered a luxury. A stagecoach pulled by horses was available that could be used only by the rich, and later in the 1920s there was a small motor-van. To have a ride on either of these vehicles, one had to reserve a place at least one day before, because the number of passengers was limited. The motor-van transportation was in use until the 1940s. Only in 1945 was a bus introduced as public transportation connecting the neighboring villages of Calci, Agnano, and Asciano to Pisa.<sup>8</sup>

One of the oldest topographical problems at the piedmont of the Pisani Mountains was a swamp created by geological changes in the land surface, obstructing the rain and springs water coming down the mountains from flowing out to the sea. The records show that through the centuries several attempts were made to free the waters and to reclaim the marsh. One noted attempt was made in 1096 to make a ditch toward

the sea. Another was attempted in the 1500s. Cosimo I de Medici attempted to free the waters on the territory of Asciano and the neighboring villages, but was unsuccessful, although the scientist Galileo Galilei participated in one of these canal projects. But between 1929-1934 new hydraulic and engineering knowledge and technology allowed a network of canals to be built; these interconnected water-retaining reservoirs and water-scooping machines to regiment the waters and to exsiccate the swamps.

Before the swamps were exsiccated they were used only as pasture for wild cattle mostly owned by the big landowners. Besides providing meat the cattle skins were used to make leather that, as appears in the records, was used in the flourishing leather industry in Pisa. Another product indispensable for the leather industry was myrtle, shrubs that are abundant on Mount Pisano; the peasants of Asciano collected it for additional family income.<sup>9</sup>

The higher part of Mount Pisano was always covered with tall trees of various types, including oak, helm oak, cork-oak, beech, cluster pine, and chestnut. Some types were, or remained, more prevalent than others at different periods. The abundance of various trees provided the villagers with wood for building homes and simple peasant furniture, as well as for cooking and heating. Chestnuts were collected to be consumed as food. Less than 400 meters above sea level, where the climate was mild, olive trees had been cultivated since antiquity. Olive oil was one of the major products in Asciano and in the neighboring villages, and making it was the most important occupation of the peasants in that region. The oil was of very good quality and, besides being used by the peasants' families; it provided income from its sale on the market. On the lower portion of the slopes of Asciano there were small vineyards, and wine was produced for local use and for the market. The land near the peasants' homes was cultivated as vegetable gardens and fruit trees for family use.

During the feudal times the agricultural economy of the villages in the region depended on a *Signor*, as the landlord was called. He was the absolute authority in the village. The landlord was giving the land in a feud to the peasants who cultivated it. For its use the peasants had to give the landlord a part of the crop in kind and to pay a part in money; in addition they had to provide some services for him. The landlord was supposed to protect the peasant and his family and to take care of them in case of illness and at old age. For this reason the peasants were settling near the castles and villas of their protectors, thus forming the villages. With the passing of time many peasants were able to purchase land from the landowners and cultivate their own land. Some peasants became sharecroppers and worked the land for a share of the crop.

From feudal times the village of Asciano was almost self-sufficient, as there were men who practiced various trades: carpenters, masons, millers, oil-mill crushers, shepherds, and terrace-builders, who did build the terraces on the steep slopes of the mountain for the cultivation of the olive trees, and, after the 1920s there were the bicycle repairmen. Also there were washerwomen and washermen who engaged in the trade that provided income for their families.

Asciano had two grain mills that worked with the torrential water-power, and it had four oil mills that used the water-power to crush the olives and press the oil; in addition it had six oil mills that used the strength of the men or the donkeys to do this work. At present electric motors are used for this purpose.<sup>10</sup>

Through the years Asciano became a very large village and was self-sufficient by

having various shops and artisans that served the major needs of the villagers. Some of the shops in the village were: grocery shops, haberdashery shops, butcher shops, wine shops and bars, soft-drink and beer shops, and wood shops. The artisans were: barbers, shoemakers, clogmakers, tailors, blacksmiths, shoeing smiths, and carters. Through the years there were different people that owned the shops or conducted artisan trades and some of the names from the past 80 to 100 years can be found in the written records, or remembered by the older folks. Among the names of the shopkeepers and the artisans of Asciano are several ancestors and relatives of Giulio Verro, including Beppe, or Giuseppe Franchini, his maternal grandfather who was a shoemaker. There were also other relatives recorded, such as Fiora Cortopassi, who had a wine shop, and Scarsi, who sold beer and soft drinks; also mentioned in the records was a merchant Bongiani, who had a butcher shop in Asciano in the years 1914-1915.<sup>11</sup>

Giulio's maternal ancestry can be traced to the beginnings of the 1800s, the time when the written records from the archives of the Commune of San Giuliano Terme were found for the Franchini family tree<sup>12</sup>. The records show that in 1832, in Asciano, Valentino Franchini, Giulio's maternal great-grandfather, was born. He was a son of Antonio Franchini and Rosa Conti. The records also show that in 1847, in Asciano, Natalina Beconcini, Giulio's maternal great-grandmother, was born. She was a daughter of Giuseppe Beconcini and Serafina Orsini.<sup>13</sup>

Five children were born from the marriage of Valentino Franchini and Natalina Beconcini. In 1868 the oldest son Giuseppe Franchini, Giulio's maternal grandfather, was born; in 1886 twin daughters Rosa and Fiorina Franchini were born; in 1893 son Guido Franchini was born, and in 1894 the youngest son, Luigi Sirio Franchini. No further records were found for these two younger sons.<sup>14</sup> Fiorina Franchini married Amerigo Cortopassi<sup>15</sup> and Rosa Franchini married Attilio Ruperti,<sup>16</sup> and the records of these two sisters family-tree branches can be found on the "Franchini Family Tree." Giuseppe Franchini married Maria Anna Bertini, Giulio's maternal grandmother.

The ancestry of Maria Anna Bertini can also be traced to the early 1800s, to her paternal grandfather Antonio Bertini; he had a son Gustavo Bertini; Maria Anna's maternal grandfather, Taddeo Lorenzini, had a daughter Elvira Lorenzini. The dates of birth of these ancestors and grandmothers' names could not be established. Gustavo Bertini had married Elvira Lorenzini and they had five children; for three of them, Maria, Ardeconda, and Amerigo, no further record was found. One daughter, Santina Bertini, had married Angelo Cervelli. And another daughter, Maria Anna Bertini was born in 1867 and at birth was called as Maria Paolina Annina.<sup>17</sup>

Giuseppe Franchini and Maria Anna Bertini had four children. In 1888 the oldest daughter Elvira Franchini was born; two years later, in 1890 the older son Pietro Franchini was born; in 1896 the younger daughter Egeria Franchini was born; and in 1905 the youngest son Duilio Franchini was born.<sup>18</sup> Elvira Franchini had married Pietro Scarsi,<sup>19</sup> Pietro Franchini remained unmarried; Duilio Franchini had married Virginia, a woman from the village of Melazzo located near the city of Turin in the Piedmont region in Northern Italy.<sup>20</sup> The life story of Giulio's mother, Egeria Franchini, is described in the separate chapter.<sup>21</sup>

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1. Aldo Tratz, *Asciano E La Sua Storia* [in Italian] (Pisa, Italy: Europrint, 1992). Selected historical information, trans. by Olga Gladky Verro, 1996.

2. Ibid., 23.
3. Ibid., 27-42.
4. Ibid., 42-77.
5. Ibid., 133-136.
6. Ibid., 83-94.
7. Ibid., 95-110.
8. Ibid., 116.
9. Ibid., 118-137.
10. Ibid., 123-141.
11. Ibid., 123.
12. Paolo Pieracci, "Franchini's Family Tree," genealogical chart researched in the archives of Commune of San Giuliano Terme and from the local relatives and neighbors, Asciano, 1994. Further annotated as Franchini Family Tree.
13. Franchini Family Tree, Foglio 1.
14. Ibid., Foglio 6.
15. Ibid., Foglio 5.
16. Ibid., Foglio 2.
17. Ibid., Foglios 2 and 4.
18. Ibid., Foglio 4.
19. Ibid., Foglio 7.
20. Ibid., Foglio 8.
21. See the chapter "Dea Egeria."

## Dea Egeria

**As Recounted by Giulio Verro**

**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

The second daughter of Beppe<sup>2</sup> Franchini<sup>3</sup> and Anna Bertini Franchini was born on November 23, 1896 in the county of San Giuliano Terme, village of Asciano<sup>4</sup> near the town of Pisa in Tuscany Region of Italy. The village doctor gave her the name Egeria, a very unusual name to be given to a daughter of a poor, ordinary village couple. However, Egeria was among the many children in Asciano who were given uncommon names. This trend began shortly after the new doctor arrived in the village and established his practice there. It seems that parents of one newborn baby asked the doctor, "Signor Doctor, what should we name our baby?" The good doctor looked at the newborn and gave him the name of someone who was renowned in the past and he recounted the story of that famous person to the parents.

The news that the doctor had given a fancy name to the baby spread very quickly in the village and from that time on many parents in Asciano asked the doctor to name their newborns. It appears that the village doctor enjoyed giving unusual names to the newborns and that he liked to tell the parents stories about the historical, religious, or mythological figures who had those names in the past.

That's how it happened with Beppe and Anna when they asked the doctor to give a pretty name to their younger daughter. They listened with wonder to the story from Roman mythology about a nymph Egeria, a nature goddess who advised and dictated

the laws to Numa, the second king of Rome. From this entire story Beppe and Anna, who were simple villagers, retained only a notion that their daughter was named after *Dea Egeria*, or the goddess Egeria, and this nickname stuck with her.

When she was a child, the family and relatives used this nickname to make fun of her and tease her. As she became a teenager and later a young maiden, her peers and other villagers made fun of her by calling her Dea Egeria. It was nothing unusual, since it was a notorious custom in Asciano, as well as in the whole region of Tuscany by the people of lower class, to give funny and sometimes derisive nicknames to others. And it was considered smart to tease the fellow villagers. At least her nickname was not funny and, as she was growing up and perceived that this name belonged to a superior creature, she became even proud of it.

Egeria, her sister, Elvira, and their brothers, Pietro and Duilio, all attended the village's elementary school and were able to read, write, and use a rudimentary arithmetic. Later, as was customary in those days, the Mother sent Egeria to the nuns to learn some sewing and knitting, skills that were considered useful for girls. She mastered knitting skills very well. Then she became an apprentice to the village seamstress for a while, where she learned enough to be able to sew simple items of clothing for herself and the family. By the time Egeria matured into a healthy-looking and neat maiden the young men began to notice her, and the villagers complimented Beppe and Anna about their younger daughter, who had blossomed into "*un campione di ragazza*", which was a colloquial expression of praise—"a fine specimen of a girl."

All this attention and the perception she had about Dea Egeria influenced her self-assurance and gave her a touch of vanity; it was as if she had somehow inherited with the nickname the spirit of that mythical deity. She kept her head high and did not hide that she was proud of herself.

Egeria was slightly more than average height. Her oval face had a fresh, youthful complexion and pleasant features. She had a small, slightly turned-up nose and narrowly shaped eyes, which seemed even narrower from her way of keeping them half-open, as she was bestowing a favor on someone by looking at them. Everything in her demeanor alluded to her confidence that she deserved the attention and the privilege to choose among the best eligible young men in the village of Asciano. This attitude was in discord with the status of her family, who was poor, had no property that she could inherit, and could not afford to give her a decent personal dowry.

She knew this well from the example of her older sister Elvira, who married the widower Pietro Scarsi.<sup>5</sup> Pietro was from a better-off Ascianese family, his father had property, and there was a lot of discontent in his family because he took a wife from a have-nots family. But Anna and Beppe were happy that their not-so-pretty, but robust and hard-working, daughter Elvira had settled down with a man who had his own house with some adjacent land for a vegetable garden, some fruit trees, a hen coop, and a modest olive grove on a terrace on the slope of the mountain. In addition, he could expect to inherit more after the death of his father, whose property would be divided among the three children. Anna was hoping that her younger daughter Egeria, being much better looking than her older sister Elvira, could find a well-to-do husband even though her family was poor.

Egeria's father, Beppe Franchini, was a good-natured, calm, simple man. He worked long hours as a village shoemaker, but his earnings were barely enough to feed

and clothe his family and to pay for the rent on the small house where he, his wife, and their four children lived, and where he worked. It was no wonder, because in those days everything in the shoemaking trade was done by hand with simple hand tools, and it took him the entire week to make one pair of shoes. But Beppe liked his trade because his customers appreciated his work, and because it was not as hard as working the land or any other trades that required physical strength. Besides, in good weather he could work outside sitting on a low stool near the front door of the house and, as he was working, he could see villagers passing by. They saluted him and some stopped to exchange a few words, or to chat longer if they had no urgent business to take care of. Every Saturday an old villager, Tangheroni, stopped and saluted him. "Oh, Beppe, we are again on Saturday!" And, as Beppe would continue to work on a shoe, they would chat for a while exchanging the village's news.

Egeria's mother, Anna, was helping some washerwomen in the village to do the laundry for their clients from Pisa,<sup>6</sup> which added to the family income. She was able to make ends meet with whatever money they had and to feed the family by preparing economical meals, such as chick peas, beans, or lentil soups, and homemade pasta with tomato and pork sausage sauce. She could not afford to buy meat every day, even if she bought the cheapest cuts. Occasionally Anna sent her daughter Egeria to the butcher shop, where the butcher Bongianni knew what cuts of meat the family could afford.

Butcher Bongianni noticed Egeria blossoming from an insignificant teenager into an attractive maiden. He began to pay more attention to her and to flatter her with compliments, which Egeria received with pleasure. Her mother noticed that when she sent her daughter to the butcher shop she was returning with much more meat and better cuts than would be expected for the money she gave her. Indeed, Bongianni was very generous to her daughter compared to what he gave her when she herself went to the butcher shop.

Anna saw the opportunity to use the butcher's partiality to her daughter, and she encouraged Egeria to "be good to Bongianni" and accept his compliments graciously. She told her that there was nothing wrong with flirting with him a little, because Bongianni was a married man and had four young children—the oldest was ten or twelve years old—and it was flattering for him to have the attention of a young maiden.

But Egeria didn't tell her mother that she was already doing all she was encouraging her to do. And that she was doing it not because he was giving her more or better cuts of meat, but because she was flattered by his attention. Bongianni was a mature and attractive man; he had good manners compared to the young men in the village and his compliments meant a lot to her. She couldn't tell all this to her mother. But her mother's encouragement to be good to Bongianni was now an excuse for Egeria to stay longer in the butcher shop without being reprimanded by her mother.

Bongianni was not made of wood, and one day he couldn't overcome the temptation to possess the young maiden and he seduced her. But soon after it happened he became frightened of the possible consequences. He was a good and loving father and felt for his wife more than just a simple affection. His conscience, although too late to undo what had happened, didn't allow him to continue the flirtation with the young girl.

Egeria couldn't understand the sudden change in Bongianni's behavior and tried

to restore the happy flirtations with him. But she was unsuccessful, even though he continued to give her generous cuts of meat.

Time was not standing still and soon Egeria's body began to show changes that could not be concealed any longer from her mother and from the small world of the village. The gossip spread quickly and people asked, "Who did it?" But no one could be sure because the war<sup>7</sup> was going on and many young men from Asciano had been drafted and sent up north to the front to fight. People guessed that maybe the culprit was among them. However, the Mother finally forced her daughter to tell her the name of her seducer.

Beppe and Anna confronted Bongianni to admit that he was the father of the child to be born to their daughter. Anna insisted that he should provide for both the mother and the child and threatened him that she would tell to his wife everything.

Suddenly the terrible news spread in Asciano, "The butcher Bongianni killed himself." The villagers were puzzled. "His business was good. What happened to him? Why did he do it?"

When Egeria heard the blood-curdling news from the neighbors, she fainted, revealing her secret. It was the second time in a few months that her destiny was affected by Bongianni's unfortunate choice of behavior. This time the blow was much more tragic than the first one, when she found out that she would have his child. At least before she had hope that the child would have a father who in some way could help him, but now this poor baby was fatherless before he was even born. It took Egeria some time to recover from this tragedy in her life, but her strong character helped her to regain self-assurance. She said to herself, "This baby will be born and I will take care of him."

Bongianni's wife told Egeria that her husband had confessed to being the father of the child to be born and asked her forgiveness. The remorse toward the two women and his children had led him to the act of weakness because he didn't have the courage to confront the situation. To spare himself, his wife, and his children from the scandal, he chose the easy way out.

It was Bongianni's wife who was the most sympathetic to the young girl whom her husband had wronged. She was generous in helping Egeria, mostly with food, before and after the child was born. However, as soon as she found a buyer, she sold the butcher shop and the house and moved from Asciano to spare herself and her children from the humiliation. She knew well that the populace of that small village could be cruel, that it didn't forget the human weaknesses and mistakes for long time; gossip passed from one generation to another. She knew that the villagers could make the life of adults and children miserable by their disdainful attitude, contemptuous treatment, and by teasing with scornful nicknames.

Three days before Christmas, on December 22, 1915, a son was born to Egeria Franchini in the hospital in Pisa. She named him Giulio. Because Egeria was not married, she couldn't give the last name of the father. The nuns who registered the newborn gave him the last name Orchidei. Egeria returned to Asciano with her son Giulio to live with her mother and father. For less than one year she took care and breastfed her baby-boy.

At that time her older brother Pietro had just returned from France as did many Italians during World War I. He had gone there a few years before in search of higher

wages. He returned home as a very changed man. He never told anybody what happened to him there, except that he occasionally mentioned that a Catholic priest befriended him. Before, Pietro's attitude toward the church, religion, and God was just a matter of custom, rather than a devotion or faith. This attitude was very common among the populace of this region in Tuscany and could be traced way back to the dark period of middle ages, when the people suffered from the invasions, pestilence, floods, and famine, and through the years it was past from one generation to another. When Pietro returned from France his attitude had completely changed—he became a devout Catholic and a deeply religious man.

Upon his return home, Pietro went up north to the city of Turin in the Piedmont region, where at that time the automobile industry had created many opportunities at the FIAT<sup>8</sup> and in the small shops that were auxiliary to that big industry.

From Turin Pietro wrote to his sister that he had found work and would soon resume sending money home, as he had done before from France; then their mother would not need to supplement the family income by working for the washerwomen, a job that was becoming hard for her age. He suggested to Egeria that if she could leave her baby with her mother in Asciano, he could find work for her in Turin. He mentioned that she could earn higher wages in Turin and have a better job than in the village and with her earnings could help her mother to take care of her son. Anna and Beppe agreed that this solution was in the best interest of all concerned, especially for Egeria, who could have a better chance to find a husband there than in Asciano, where her reputation was tarnished.

Pietro mailed her money for the train tickets and in the fall of 1916 she left Asciano with a small bundle containing her clothes, a couple of towels, a set of bed linen, and a blanket. When Egeria arrived in Turin, Pietro placed her in a job as a waitress in a small family restaurant where he had been eating every day since he arrived in town and the woman owner knew him to be a reliable man. He knew the woman well enough to entrust his sister to her, because she offered her a place to live as well.

Egeria worked hard and the owner of the restaurant appreciated her very much. Egeria was sending money regularly to her mother for the support of her baby boy and was able to make some trips to Asciano to see Giulio, to whom she had become attached. She diligently knitted in the evenings after her chores in the restaurant were done. She made him sweaters, socks, and hats and also sewed pants and shirts for him so that he would be well dressed. When she was visiting her son in Asciano, she proudly showed him off by walking with him in the village.

The family restaurant where Egeria worked was mostly patronized by workingmen; some were local and some were immigrants from other regions of Italy where jobs were scarce, so they came to Turin to earn money. Most of the men were either bachelors or, if they were married, they had left their families in their native villages or towns. It was an ideal place for Egeria to find a husband, and she had several admirers who were seeking her favors. But she had good advisers, the woman who owned the restaurant and her brother Pietro, who was eating there. They scrutinized each man who seemed to be interested in Egeria and looked first at his intentions and then considered his potential as a good husband and provider for the family. It was not easy to find a man who could qualify as a husband with such strict requirements.

It took a long time until one eligible young man began to court Egeria and his

qualifications were approved unanimously. He was from a well-to-do family, Egeria liked him, and he asked her to marry him. When Pietro, in the presence of Egeria, presented him with the fact that she had an illegitimate son, it didn't bother him at all, and he said that he would take good care of him. But when Pietro asked if he would adopt the boy, the answer was a categorical "no" because his family would not approve of giving their name to a child who was not from their bloodline. However, he offered an excellent financial arrangement for her son. He said that he would pay Egeria's mother to take care of the boy until he reached school age. Then he would send the boy to a very good private boarding school and, if the boy was smart, he would pay for his further education; otherwise, he would send him to learn a good trade.

He said that Egeria could visit her son as often as she wanted and would have enough money to provide for all the boy's needs. But the boy could not live with them because it would eventually become known to his family and relatives, as well as to their circle of friends, that his wife had an illegitimate child. This was considered dishonorable and would reflect on his whole family, especially on his unmarried sisters' chances to marry into a good family. And his parents would never forgive him for this. Therefore, it should remain a secret between him and Egeria.

Pietro understood that the situation was becoming too complicated for his sister to make a decision immediately and he replied that Egeria would need some time to sort out all those conditions before giving to him a definite answer.

Pietro and Egeria consulted with the woman who owned the eating-place where she worked. They disagreed on the advantages and disadvantages of conditions that this man was offering her. Pietro told his sister that it was very important that her son would be adopted and have the same last name as her other children born from this marriage, thus preserving the secrecy that he was born as an illegitimate child.

The woman was more practical. She was very impressed with such a generous offer by the man to provide for all the financial needs of bringing up the child, especially the cost of placing the boy in a good boarding school and a promise to pay for his further schooling as long as the boy's abilities would allow him to profit from it. Besides that, Egeria would be marrying a well-to-do man who would give her a comfortable life and the means of elevating herself and her son from the hardships of poverty.

The last word, however, was up to Egeria. She said that during these few years she had become very fond of her son and as a mother she wanted to have him close to her. The idea of keeping her son away from her and from her future family, and especially of sending him away to a boarding school, meant a permanent separation. Also she wanted her son to have a father and have his name. This way she would not have to give him any explanations about who his real father was.

Therefore, when the man came for the answer to his marriage proposal, Egeria told him that she couldn't marry him. She explained that she would wait to marry a man who would adopt her son Giulio and who would not be afraid to give him his name, who would be willing to be a father for her son, and would allow her to keep her son close to her.

The man was very surprised to hear her answer but he didn't change his previous offer, which he considered to be very generous. And before leaving he told Egeria that one day she would regret her refusal to marry him.

When the woman who owned the eating-place understood Egeria's reasoning,

she decided to talk about her with her nephew Ermengardo. Since he had returned from the war,<sup>9</sup> he had been coming occasionally to eat in his aunt Margarita's place. As a war veteran he got a good job at the Turin's Municipal Streetcar Enterprise as a streetcar conductor collecting fares from the passengers. He told her that now that he had a steady and secure job he wanted to settle down, find a good wife, and start a family.

She didn't tell him at first about Egeria, because of her well-to-do admirer. But once Egeria dismissed him, she decided to be a matchmaker for her nephew Gardo as she called him for short. She told him that she had just the right woman for him—young, pleasant, neat, and hard-working—her waitress Egeria. She told him that Egeria had just dismissed a well-to-do young man who wanted to marry her because he refused to adopt her son who was born out of wedlock. She told her nephew that, if adopting Egeria's son was not a problem for him, and, if they liked each other, she would even pay for their wedding.

Ermengardo began to visit his aunt's eating-place more often and remained there after closing time when Egeria would finish her chores. It didn't take long for them to realize that it was their destiny to get married.

In the summer of 1920 the wedding of Ermengardo Verro and Egeria Franchini took place in her native village of Asciano. His aunt Margarita kept her word and paid for all the expenses. She did for them even more: she helped them to set up their ménage.

Giulio recalls that he was almost five-years-old at that time, and remembered this big event vividly all his life.

"My mother dressed me in a brand new suit and shoes. My mother and lots of people were all dressed up in festive clothing. There was much confusion and I couldn't understand what was going on. During the reception my mother took me by the hand and led me to the man, whom I never saw before, and said, 'Giulio, this is your father. Give him a kiss.' The man bent down and I, who was a very obedient boy, kissed him on the cheek. My mother instructed me, 'You shall call him Babbo.'<sup>10</sup> There were many people who were watching this scene of my first encounter with my father and I became shy and ran away to look for my grandfather.

"One old woman stopped me and looking straight into my eyes said, 'Listen Giulio, that man is not your father! Your father was a butcher Bongianni and he is dead!' I could never forget this woman and what she told me. Many times during my childhood and teenage years I wanted to ask my mother about it, but I was afraid. I thought that one day she herself would tell me if it was true. But she didn't; she probably considered that I was too young to know about it. But I perceived that this was a taboo and never talked about it with anybody.

"Leaving Asciano, my mother told me, 'As soon as we settle down with your father, I will come and take you to live with us in Turin where you will go to school.' This was the best news for me because every time she came to see me she would go away again. I wished that one day my mother would take me and I would remain living with her forever."

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1. Also as recounted to Giulio Verro by his mother, Egeria Franchini Verro, and their relatives, ed. and trans. from Italian by Olga Gladky Verro, 1995-1997. See the chapters "Chance, Destiny or the Will of God" and "Repatriation."

2. Nickname for Giuseppe (Joseph, in English).

3. See the chapter "The Village of Asciano."

4. Ibid.
5. "Franchini's Family Tree," Foglio 7.
6. Aldo Tratzzi, Asc., 123.
7. World War I, 1914-1915.
8. *FIAT* – acronym for *Fabbrica Italiana Automobili di Torino*
9. World War I.
10. Dad in Italian.

## Giulio's Years Of Growing Up

**As Remembered by Giulio Verro**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

It was a great joy for me when my mother came to the village of Asciano, where I lived with my grandparents, to take me to Turin to live with her and her husband, who, as she told me, was my father.<sup>1</sup>

I was about four-and-half years old and had never been in the big city. It was a great adventure for me to travel on the train and on the streetcar. An even greater surprise for me was to climb the four flights of stairs in the huge apartment building in Corso Novara, where my mother lived on the fifth floor. The apartment was at the end of a long balcony with several doors to other apartments and one to the communal latrine. The apartment had two rooms; one was a kitchen where I had a couch to sleep on, and another was my mother and father's bedroom with a huge bed.

From the day of my arrival in Turin, my greatest fear was that one day she would send me back if I displeased her. I remember that as a child I always waited with great anticipation for her rare visits to see me in Asciano, and I never had enough time to have her near me. She was always telling me that she could not stay very long because she had to go back to the big city where she worked. As I remember, my greatest desire was that she would take me to live with her forever. Therefore, when my wish came true and she took me to live with her, I was always afraid to upset her or my father in any way, because to discipline me she used to scare me, "If you are disobedient, I would send you back to Asciano to live with your grandparents."

In the 1930s in Italy, as in the rest of Europe, there was an economic crisis. The small factories and shops were either closing or reducing their work, and even FIAT<sup>2</sup> and other large factories had lowered their production and reduced their workers schedule to two or three days a week. Four of my mother's cousins,<sup>3</sup> Mario and Oberto Cortopassi, Enrico Macchi and his brother Alberto, who worked at the Villar Perosa,<sup>4</sup> were working only three days a week. Their families had a very hard time making ends meet.

I remember one occasion that remained memorable in our family long after those hard times had passed. It was the day before Christmas and all my mother's cousins decided to have a holiday dinner with all the families together in our apartment. My mother and her cousin Dina Macchi made meat ravioli, which was a traditional Christmas dish in Turin. They had to make enough dough to make ravioli for eight adults and four children. Well, to save some money Dina insisted on using only one egg to the dough, which had to be rolled very thin and stuffed with chopped meat. My mother

argued that the dough would break once the ravioli was put into boiling water. I don't remember who won that argument; I think it was my mother, because we ate good ravioli on that Christmas day.

My father who worked for a city owned Municipal Streetcar Enterprise, called ATM,<sup>5</sup> as a streetcar conductor selling tickets to the passengers was considered to be lucky to have a steady job and a reliable income. However, my mother helped to add some extra money by working at home. She took precut items from a vendor in the central city market of Porta Palazzo and sewed work pants all day long, pedaling the treadle sewing machine with her feet.

From an early age I had to help my mother with many chores, such as cutting the loose threads from the finished pants, preparing the meals under her step-by-step instructions, washing the ceramic tile kitchen floor, dusting the furniture, and watching my baby brother Domenico, who was six years younger. I always tried very hard to please my mother and did all my chores without complaining. I learned to take each chore as a kind of a game I was playing, but sometimes it didn't work as I expected, as it happened one day when I was about seven or eight years old.

One afternoon my baby brother Domenico, who was sleeping in the darkened bedroom, began to cry. My mother was in the kitchen pedaling the sewing machine. She told me to go in the bedroom and rock the baby in his cradle. I went into the dark room, sat on the floor near the cradle, and began to rock it first very slowly, but my brother continued to cry. Well, I started to push it a little bit more and the cradle was swinging higher; then I pushed it harder and harder and the cradle was swinging higher, and higher... Suddenly I saw the baby fly out of the cradle and heard his frightened shrill cry as he landed on the ceramic tile floor almost under my parents' big bed, and he stopped crying.

My mother rushed into the bedroom screaming, "What happened?! What happened?!" Terrified, I was able only to point with my finger at my brother lying on the floor. "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" It was all my mother could exclaim as she lifted the baby. Seized with panic, she ran with him on the balcony to *Madama*<sup>6</sup> Ferro, our next-door neighbor, to get help. I followed her and stopped on the balcony near the open door watching to see what would happen.

The woman took the baby from my mother and gave him a few light slaps on his buttocks. I heard that baby began to cry again and my mother and our neighbor made a long sigh of relief. I quickly returned to our apartment and sat quietly on the chair expecting big punishment from my mother. But she was so relieved that my brother was not hurt, that she only admonished me for being so reckless with the baby and made me promise not to do it anymore.

One chore that I really hated was dusting with the rag the numerous spring coils on my parents' huge bed. I had to slip on my back into the narrow space between the floor and the bedsprings and dust each coil; the coils were secured with wire to wire net holding the wool mattress. No matter how careful I was, I usually scratched my hands against those wires. When the rag was full of dust, I would slip out from under the bed and go to the balcony to shake it out. I was trying to stay outside as long as I could before going back under the bed to finish my job. Even though I disliked the chore, I always did it without complaining to please my mother, always afraid that she would punish me and send me back to live with my grandparents in Asciano.

Of all my chores I liked helping my mother to cook most of all. She would tell me, "Giulio, take the small pan and put it on the table... Now, take the bottle with the oil and put a little oil in a pan. Show it to me, how much..." She would check it and approve it.

"Now, take an onion, peel it, and slice it on the wooden board. Be careful not to cut your fingers." As I would finish slicing the onion she would say, "Good boy, you did very well. Now put the onion in the pan and put it on the stove. Take the wooden spoon and stir it once in a while so it will not burn..."

Then she would ask me if the onion was becoming transparent and order me to move the pan to the side of the stove and give me further instructions. "Now, take a glass and fill it half full of water. Take the jar with tomato paste and put two teaspoons of it in the glass and mix it well. Show it to me... Very well, good boy. Now, slowly pour it on the onion in the pan and put it back on low heat to cook the sauce..."

I liked to help my mother with cooking because she was giving me so much attention and praised me for a job well done. I was eager to please her and was especially happy to hear her approval of my work. Later, when I started to attend school I was still helping my mother to cook during my vacations, even after she stopped sewing workpants.

When I was about seven years old during the summer vacations my mother used to send me to our parish of San Gioachino to attend the catechism classes conducted by the nuns; there I had to learn the prayers and the Catholic dogma. I had to get ready for confirmation, which was performed<sup>7</sup> on May 17, 1923. Although it was supposed to be a religious Catholic custom, it became a festive occasion when the boys and girls were dressed in new outfits; their parents and relatives wore their Sunday clothes and attended the ceremony in the church. I remember for that occasion my father came in the church, which he very rarely attended, because, as I found out later, he didn't accept the church authority and didn't agree with the priests' preaching.

My father lived on his own from the time he was seven or eight years old, because he couldn't stand to live under his mother's authoritative rule. He earned his living by helping the cobblestone masons who were building the roads in the city and his job was rolling the stones for them. He slept in the baskets at the open market, or in the carts in the storage place where he worked. It was a hard life for the young boy, but he endured all to have the independence from his authoritative mother.

Although my father's schooling did not go beyond the first grade, he learned on his own how to read and write, and he learned how to count money while his mother kept him from infancy in the basket under the bench on the central market of Porta Palazzo, where she was a vendor of vegetables.

From his own experience he knew that it was not easy to find good work without education. Therefore, although our family could not afford to pay for our education in private schools, my father did his best to ensure that both my younger brother Domenico and I attended and graduated not only from elementary school, but also had some vocational training.

In the fall of 1922, when I was six-and-a-half years old, my parents enrolled me in the very good private elementary school for boys named *Fratelli Delle Scuole Cristiane*, or The Brothers of the Christian Schools, which was conducted by the Catholic priests who were in charge of teaching. The first five years the boys could attend the school free, without paying any tuition.

The priests were very severe with the discipline in school and some were more quick than the others to punish by slapping our hands with a long thin ruler, which hurt a lot. Some other teachers preferred that our parents would punish us and were reporting even the smallest transgressions either by ordering us to tell our parents, or by giving us a note.

I remember my good friend Aldo Mulinary, who was in my class and with whom I walked to and from school everyday. He lived in our apartment house in the corner apartment on the landing of the fourth floor where I lived. When we were returning home from school we often complained to each other, "When I return home, I would get spanked."

"Me too."

"For what?"

"I don't know. For something."

One day Aldo said, "I am tired of being spanked. Let's run away from home."

We discussed where we could go, but never did take this proposition seriously. But it gave us consolation that if things would become really bad, there was a way to escape from being spanked.

While Aldo and I were attending the elementary school, all students had to enroll in the Fascist Balilla<sup>8</sup> youth organization. Since our fathers, as many others, could not afford to buy us the black uniforms, we received them free, a shirt, a fez,<sup>9</sup> shorts, a neckerchief, and socks.

On Saturdays we had to attend obligatory meetings, during which we received the Fascist Party's indoctrination. But we also marched outside, and had fun doing some gymnastics. We liked to go there because it was always better than staying at home on the balcony. Our mothers could not supervise us playing outside behind our apartment building and allowed us to go down to play in Via Favria only for a very short time. Via Favria was a narrow side street used only by some pedestrians, the women going to the public laundry, and neighborhood children to play. There, on the cobblestone pavement with the overgrown bunches of grass between the stones, we could stretch our legs by running and playing active games with a ball.

At about age twelve, we were promoted from the Balilla to the next level of the Fascist youth organization, which was called a Fascist Avanguardist. As before, on Saturdays, we had to attend obligatory meetings for indoctrination, and had some paramilitary type training and lots of marching.

Although my father was an anti-fascist at heart and a supporter of socialist ideas, he had to conceal this from us and from the others for the sake of maintaining his job with the city. But he felt that it was good for me to belong to the youth organization, where I was learning discipline and had some exercise under the supervision of adults.

When my brother Domenico and I were young, one type of recreation our family had, the same as many other workers' families, was to have picnics on the shores of the small River Stura, the affluent of the River Po. This we could do only on some Sundays when my father had a day off. We used to go there with the family of our next-door neighbors by the name of Fascia and some of my mother's cousins.

The place was quite far away from where we lived and it was possible to take a train. But the tickets for the whole family were too expensive and we had to walk. My mother would prepare some food, such as boiled eggs, or omelet, salad, and tomato

sauce. Then we would take a big pot with us to boil spaghetti on the open fire. All this, and bread, dishes, forks, knives, glasses, and a tablecloth to put on the grass were placed in bags that each of us had to carry. We would get started early in the morning when the sun was not too hot. We would stay there all day long, bathe in the river, play on the grass, and the adults would rest under the shade of the trees. All tired, but happy, we would return home in the evening. I remember that one time my mother took the train home alone, because she had cut her foot on a piece of glass in the river and couldn't walk.

These outings became very rare after the two families had a big fight over something that my mother could never forgive our neighbor for. I remember that after the fight my mother smudged the face of *Madama* Fascia on her photo.<sup>10</sup> After this fight my parents became very cautious in choosing their friends and, indeed, I don't remember that they ever had any more close friends. I remember that my father and my mother were often saying, "It is better not to have any friends, than to have bad ones." And my mother kept company only with her brothers Pietro and Duilio, and with her cousins,<sup>11</sup> Dina and Enrico Macchi, Derna and Oberto Cortopassi, and Mario and Iris Cortopassi, who lived in our neighborhood.

My father worked in shifts and he had only one Sunday off in five weeks. He liked to make that day a special day for the whole family. He would go in the morning to a delicatessen shop and buy an antipasto for lunch, usually 100 grams each of very thinly sliced cooked ham, cooked and hard salami, one can of sardines, and thinly sliced cheese, or in the winter a cream cheese called *mascarpone* to spread a thin layer on bread. For this occasion he would also buy a better quality of Barbera wine, which for us children was diluted with water. For us it was a real treat, because our family could not afford to have such delicacies every day.

Then in the afternoon we would all put on our Sunday clothes and walk to the center of the city and go to the first-class movie theater to see the newest movie that would not be shown for a long time in the second-class theaters in our neighborhood. After the movies, we would stroll under the portico of Via Roma admiring the beautiful things in the windows of the luxury shops, and in the warm weather we would stop at the ice cream parlor and have another treat, a small cone of ice cream. All this was done as a very solemn ritual, as if my father wanted to emphasize that he could afford once in a while to indulge in such luxuries even if he was only a simple streetcar conductor selling tickets.

When my father had a day off on weekdays, he would occasionally do some special jobs at home. My mother would dread that day in the spring. It was the time when he would clean the pipe that ran high near the ceiling the whole length of the kitchen from the wood-burning stove to the chimney wall.

Climbing on the ladder he would remove sections of the pipe, and clean them on the balcony over the newspapers. Then he would place them on the floor in a sequential order, starting at the chimney elbow piece, which he placed at the farthest end of the bedroom near the window, and finishing it near the stove. Although my mother would spread the newspapers on the floor, my father couldn't work neatly, as she wanted. Right from the start he would spill the black silt deposit from the pipe on the kitchen floor and stepping on it would bring it all over the floor in both rooms. My mother would get upset and admonish my father at each step. He would become upset with her for

annoying him. And they would end by quarreling with each other.

After I graduated from fifth grade, I could attend a vocational school also conducted by the priests. To enroll their children, parents had to pay tuition. Although it was a great sacrifice for my family, my parents enrolled me in the vocational school, because it was highly regarded as giving a solid vocational background through teaching not only in the classroom but also having hands-on experience in the workshop.

I remember that in that school I also learned a good lesson that I should not lie when some of my friends suggested it to me. It happened one day in the workshop when I came to the desk of our instructor to ask him about something. While I was waiting for my turn I took a small metal bell from his desk that he used to dismiss us at the end of the class. As I was playing with it, the bell suddenly fell on the concrete floor and the handle broke from it. The instructor wanted to teach me a lesson and ordered me to take it home and repair it. On my way home I complained to my friend who lived in the same apartment house on the ground floor. "How can I tell my father to give me the money for this? He will spank me for it!"

My friend offered me he would ask his father to repair it for me free since his father was a plumber. With relief I accepted his offer. The next day the bell was neatly repaired and my friend told me, "If the instructor asks you how much you paid for it, tell him that it costs you five liras."

Well, I really didn't know how much it might cost to do this repair and accepted his suggestion. My instructor was very impressed with such a good repair job and asked me how much I paid for it. "Five liras!" I answered promptly.

"It is not true," said my friend loudly. He was standing next to me. "It costs him nothing. My father repaired it for him free of charge!"

I was humiliated, but found the courage to answer, "He told me to tell you that it cost five liras."

The instructor understood the malicious trick that my friend played on me and told me, "Never tell a lie, especially when somebody else tells you to say it. I hope that you have learned a good lesson." And he didn't punish me for it.

After this incident I never spoke to this boy again for many years, and we lived in the same apartment house.

At the end of the first year in vocational school I failed the exams and my father decided that he would not pay for my tuition if I could not keep up with my studies there. Therefore, in the 1927-28 school-years my father decided to enroll me in the sixth grade day class of the Parini Municipal School, which was offering free education in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades for those children who did not plan to further their education and were planning to go to work. The school also had evening classes for those teenagers who at the age of fourteen were starting to work during the day.

I still remember two of my teachers who left a great impression on me. One of them was an excellent teacher of mathematics by the name of Corna. He was able to make the math lessons so interesting and explained everything so well that everybody liked this subject. He was previously a professor of mathematics at the university, but lost his position because he didn't want to join the Fascist Party. He had written and published his own booklet on Geometry and I kept it for many years.

I don't remember the name of the other teacher, or the subject that he was teaching, but I could never forget how he taught us to use our reasoning. "Always use

your head," he used to say. "Not everything that is written and printed is always true. Everyone who is writing gives his own ideas. You should always use your own reasoning before accepting the ideas of others. With some you will agree and with others you may not agree." It impressed me so much that since then I always used reasoning before I agreed with anything I read.

When I was about twelve years old our school participated in a talent show for children of our city. I remember that I learned to recite very well the third sequence of poetry "*Il Parlamento*" by the famous Italian poet Giosue Carducci. It began with the words: "*Signori Milanesi, il consol dice, la primavera in fior mena tedeschi pur come d'uso.*" And I was selected from my class to recite it on the big stage of the Carignano Theater. After my performance in front of so many people who applauded me, I fantasized often about becoming an actor. I remember, however, that I was very disappointed that my mother didn't come to hear my performance. When I asked her to come to the theater, she told me, "I am busy, I have to wash clothes today."

My mother always managed to save money to go every year with my little brother Domenico and me to visit her numerous relatives in the native village of Asciano. She was very ambitious—and she did it the same way as she had done before when I was a little boy—she paraded us dressed in new clothes<sup>12</sup> through the village streets to show us to the villagers.

When I became fourteen years of age, which at that time in Italy was the legal age to start working, my father found me a job. But, as I started to work, I also attended the third evening integrative course at the Parini School, which was equivalent to the eighth grade of the day classes at the same school. And I graduated at the end of the 1929-30 school year.<sup>13</sup>

My first job was in a very small artisan metal shop, where all day long I painted metal handles and performed errands or other simple tasks. I remember how my mother was upset when I was bringing home my work clothes to wash, because more paint was going on my overalls than on the pieces I was painting. At that time my mother had to stop sewing work pants because she had a miscarriage and after that had problems with her health and couldn't push the pedal of the treadle sewing machine with her feet all day.

From the time I began working I was helping my family with my earnings. I was bringing my weekly pay home to my mother and she was giving me a small weekly allowance, which was enough for me to buy a stick of sweet licorice.

When I was sixteen years old, I found work in another metal shop called after the name of its owner Diena. There my hourly pay was one-half of a lira and my weekly take-home pay was about eighteen liras. My mother increased my weekly allowance to one lira, which I could spend on anything I wished. However, there were not too many choices that I could make. It was enough to go to the movies once, or for sixty cents I could buy a small bar of a dark chocolate that I liked very much. The forty cents that I saved helped me to buy a small sports newspaper the next week; I still remember its name, "*Brivido Sportivo*."<sup>14</sup> It was printed in Florence on violet-colored paper, the color of the shirts of the Florentine<sup>15</sup> soccer team, of which I was a great fan. Many of my friends, who lived in the workers' neighborhood and who were able to find some place to work, also gave their wages to their families, as I did. We often compared our meager allowances and what we were able to buy with them each week.

I remember well one incident that happened to me when I worked at the Diena shop, which had a soccer team. Like most boys my age I wanted to play soccer. But no matter how much I asked my parents to allow me to play with the team, my father would not give me his permission. He told me, "Do you know how much it would cost us if you have an injury? How would we pay for a doctor and a hospital? We cannot afford it!" In my family a decision made by my father was final and children were not allowed to question his reasons for it. Therefore, I had to be happy to be allowed on Sunday afternoons to watch team's game!<sup>16</sup>

Since my mother was very ambitious about how her sons were dressed on Sundays, I had to put on my best clothes and shoes when I went there. One day, one team player for some reason couldn't play and I was asked to take his place. Of course I couldn't refuse such an occasion to help my team! They found me a jersey and shorts but I had to play in my best shoes. When I came home my mother couldn't believe what had happened to my Sunday shoes. Naturally, she gave me a good scolding and told me to go to bed before my father arrived home from his evening shift.

Since I was sleeping with my brother Domenico on the couch in the kitchen, I only pretended to sleep while listening to what she would say to my father. She prepared him slowly before telling him about what happened to me that Sunday and talked him into allowing me to play on the team. "The boy is sixteen years old, he needs some recreational activity," was her strongest argument and finally my father agreed to let me play on the team. I almost jumped for joy, but caught myself in time from revealing that I was listening, and only turned to another side.

Some boy from the team gave me his old shoes that were in very bad shape. Luckily by that time my grandfather Franchini and my grandmother were living with my uncle Pietro in Turin. Since he used to be a shoemaker, he was able to repair the shoes somehow, although there were more nails in the soles than the leather. Well, after I started to play on the Diena soccer team,<sup>17</sup> my father started to come to see me play on his free Sundays when he was not working.

Already in my teens I started to take books from the city library and read avidly all kinds of Italian and foreign authors and adventure novels about explorers in far away lands. I remember that when I was about sixteen years old I felt that I lacked knowledge of good manners and checked out a library a book with the title, "*Gianetto Impara A Vivere*."<sup>18</sup> It was a simple story of an uncle who comes home from America and finds his young nephew Gianetto, who does not know good manners and slowly teaches him how to behave according to the customs of those days.

As I was reading that book I realized that in my working-class family good manners were limited to good behavior, respecting parents and other adults, and not telling lies. I was impressed with the book and tried to learn all the manners that Gianetto was learning from his uncle, and I consciously modified some of my manners. Later, as I became older, I read many books of classic authors and even attempted to read a book by the German philosopher Nietzsche, which I found very hard to read and understand.

After graduation from the eighth grade of the Parini School for three years I attended the private evening Alexander Volta School of Practical Electrotechnics,<sup>19</sup> from which I graduated when I was nineteen years old. My father often repeated his advice to me about finding for myself employment in public services with the city or state government, because they provided a stable and reliable work and income. At that time

in Italy there was an economic depression and such jobs were impossible to find for a young man of nineteen years of age without a good sponsor. I began to seriously consider a military career. In October 1934 I enrolled in the evening course called Assemblers of Radio Equipment, which was offered in the School of Flight Engineers and Aviation Assemblers. It was preparing radio-telegraphers for the military services in the Air Force and the Navy. In that school I met Signor Bargerò, who was teaching a practical course in radio assembly.<sup>20</sup> Since he also lived in the same part of the city called *Barriera di Milano*, we often returned home on the same streetcar and he became very friendly with me. He was employed as an engineer with the big factory called *Nebiolo*<sup>21</sup> and had many contacts with other industries in our city of Turin.

As I was attending that school, I found out that, if I waited until I became twenty-one years old and was drafted into military service, as a draftee I would have no choice in selecting the branch of military service that I liked—I would have to go wherever the draft board assigned me. However, if I enrolled as a volunteer before that time, I could choose to go into the Air Force, which I considered to be more glamorous than the other branches of military service and I was attracted to the idea of being able to fly.

At that time one episode with my father made me realize not only the limitations in his education, but also his uncompromising, authoritarian, and hot-tempered character. It happened on one hot summer night. My father and I came out of our stuffy apartment and were standing on the balcony hoping to catch some air. The full moon was high above the roofline on the other side of our apartment building and was illuminating the balconies of the upper stories and keeping the courtyard below in deep darkness. My father commented with his usual authoritarian tone, "Look, Giulio, how big is the moon. If you think that we can see it from so far away, it certainly is bigger than the sun."

"Oh, no, Babbo," I corrected him promptly, "the sun is bigger than the moon!"

"Nonsense!" replied my father. "Look at that moon. Have you ever seen the sun that size?"

"No," I answered, "The sun looks smaller because it is farther from the earth than the moon. But the moon is smaller."

"I said that the moon is bigger!" Father raised his voice.

Being sure that I was right, I rushed into the kitchen, grabbed my science textbook and found a chart of solar system. Triumphant I pointed this picture to my father, "Look here, Babbo, you can see that you are wrong."

My father turned toward me and without looking at the book gave a good smack at my cheek while screaming, "Remember, your father is never wrong!"

Humiliated by being slapped wrongly and at that age, I retreated into the kitchen. Shaking her head my mother reproached me, "You never learn. You know well that you cannot argue with your father. Now you made him all upset. And it is bad for him and for you. It doesn't cost you anything to agree with him, even if he is wrong."

I didn't even try to answer her. I took a book, sat on the chair and attempted to read, but my cheek was burning and for the first time I felt a rebellion against my father. Until now I considered that he was treating me fairly as a real father would treat his own child. I never felt that he was treating my brother Domenico, who was his own son, better than me. Of course, my brother was not as obedient as I was! However, now I could not justify my father treating me this way at my age. But my mother, why did she

accept his behavior and admonish me as if I were wrong? This I couldn't understand.

I understood that she adapted herself to accept his character and allowed him to feel as if he was always right in small matters, but on the important matters she worked on him slowly until she would achieve her goal. In money matters my father kept himself a weekly allowance that was sufficient for him to stop daily in a bar to have a cup of coffee, a quart of good wine, cigarettes, and to have a haircut. In addition he was keeping some money to pay for the movies and antipasto for the whole family on those Sundays that he was not working. The rest of his weekly wages he was giving to my mother and allowed her to be responsible to make it last until the next pay-day and to save some money to buy shoes, clothing, and whatever else was needed for the family.

My mother knew how to handle his hot temper and uncompromising attitude. She allowed him to think that he was the authority in the family. And she taught us, the children, to accept this without questioning even when his decisions were arbitrary and uncompromising. And I truly respected my father.

Although my father left home as a child, he respected his relatives and when Domenico and I were young, he and my mother took us to visit his mother and his grandmother, Liatti. I remember that both grandmothers were very strict with us children and during our visits we were expected to salute them and then to sit quietly while the adults were talking. Then there was his aunt Margarita, with whom he and my mother felt closer than any of his other relatives. Also close to my father and mother was one of his cousins, whom we called Aunt Theresa. She had a daughter who had bright red hair and we called her a Redhead.

My father also maintained a relationship with his younger brother Renzo,<sup>22</sup> who according to some relatives was fathered by my father's uncle, his father's brother, whom his mother married after her husband died. Uncle Renzo visited us occasionally, but my father was not too close to him as one could expect two brothers to be.

Uncle Renzo was an itinerant merchant and, when he had a good week, especially during the carnival time, when he earned some money, he used to come to our home with lots of food for the whole family and sweets for us children. Uncle Renzo lived alone and used to explain that he never got married because all Verros, including him, had a very difficult character and it was better not to have a family and ruin the lives of a wife and children, as his brother Gardo was doing. And this reference made my father very angry and they argued a lot about it.

But Uncle Renzo had brought up one young orphan boy, whom he even financed to study in the seminary. But after the young man was sent to be a priest in the United States of America, Uncle Renzo never heard a word from him. All the relatives commented about him being the "ungrateful priest."

There was another branch of my father's relatives who were my father's cousins by the last name of Tiboldo. There were three brothers, Remo, Lindoro, and Giovanni, and two sisters, Maria and Marcellina. Maria was very attached to our family, especially to my mother, who occasionally visited her in the summers to rest in the cool mountain air and to bring home some fresh farmer's cheese.

They all lived in their native small mountain village of Tavigliano near the town of Biella in the Alps. Like most of the inhabitants of the neighboring villages, they all worked in the nearby town of Biella at the old and famous Barbisio Men's Hat Factory, producing hats from high quality wool felt. They also owned parcels of grazing land high

in the mountains, where they raised sheep and made farmer's cheese from the sheep's milk; they preserved it in small earth cellars that were cool because they were located at the higher mountain altitude.

All of my father's relatives who lived in Turin were small merchants of one kind or another. But my father was afraid to commit himself to commerce. My mother wanted to try to sell on the market and I remember a lot of arguing about it when somebody offered her to sell aluminum pots and pans as long as she bought a set of samples. But my father didn't want to even hear about it. He didn't want to take any risk that was involved in buying wholesale and reselling the merchandise. For many years after, my mother used to reproach him for not allowing her to try to make money that could have been handy for the family. And my father would answer her, "I am not sure about making money, but one thing I am sure, we would have had plenty of sample pots and pans stored under our bed."

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1. See the chapter "Dea Egeria."
2. *Fabrica Italiana Automobili di Torino* – The largest automobile factory in Italy.
3. "The Family Tree."
4. Large ball bearing factory in the City of Turin.
5. *Azienda Tramviaria Municipale* – Municipal Streetcar Enterprise.
6. In Piedmont's tradition and dialect, the oldest married woman in the family, such as the mother-in-law.
7. From the "Certificate of Confirmation."
8. From Giulio's photo in Balilla uniform.
9. A tapering cap with a tassel hanging from the crown.
10. From the photo made during one of the outings.
11. "Franchini Family Tree."
12. From the photograph made at a photo studio in Pisa.
13. From the copies of Giulio Verro 1927-28 school year "*Pagella Scolastica*" – the report card from Municipal School and 1929-30 school year certificate of the completion of the integrative course at the Parini School. Also, the photo of the students and faculty at the end of the year.
14. "Sport's Thrill."
15. Of the city of Florence in Tuscany region of Italy.
16. From the photo of workers team from the Diena shop after the soccer game.
17. From the photos of the Diena soccer team and the Diena workers after the soccer team competition.
18. "Gianetto Learns How to Live."
19. From the photo of the graduating class of 1933-34 school year. Also, from the copy of Giulio Verro certificate of license from the Alexander Volta School of Practical Electrotechnics. Also, from the photo of Giulio Verro at the age of 19
20. From a copy of teaching contract of Mr. Bargerò from the School of Flight Engineers and Aviation Assemblers as an instructor at the School. A copy provided by Elsa Bargerò Rivelli, a daughter of Signor Bargerò.
21. Nebiolo was a manufacturer of equipment and printing machines for print shops.
22. Nickname for Lorenzo.

## Volunteer In The Italian Air Force

As Remembered by Giulio Verro

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

In the last days of March 1935 I enrolled as a volunteer in the Italian Air Force without waiting to graduate from the preparatory course in radiotelegraphy and with the approval of my parents. I would have liked to become a pilot, but to be accepted for pilot training a diploma from at least lower middle school was required. I didn't have it. So I had to settle for specializing in radiotelegraphy, for which I already had several months of theoretical study.

On April 2, 1935 I arrived at the Air Force School for Specialists in Capodichino,<sup>1</sup> where I joined a group of about two hundred students in an intensive course in radiotelegraphy. Like all radiotelegraphers students I was assigned the lowest military rank of *Aviere*.<sup>2</sup> However, at the school we had very limited training on the airplanes, which was conducted by a division of Autonomous Section of Flight. According to the records in my Personal Book of Flight<sup>3</sup> I had completed only five hours and twenty minutes of practice in flight, which was documented on the twenty-second of July, 1935 by Cornell Carlo Grillo, a Commandant of the School for Specialists.

In addition to my technical training in School for Specialists, I suddenly became exposed to all kinds of people and experiences that could be found only in the military environment. Until my enrollment in the air force I had lived with my family; they were strict with me and I had limited experience with people outside of my family, except in the schools I attended, in the neighborhood where I lived, and factories where I worked. My mother kept me accountable of all my whereabouts during my free time in the evenings and on weekends. Maybe it was for this reason that some of the episodes and peculiar people I encountered during the time I was in the military service have remained so vivid in my memory.

I remember one episode that happened during the first morning rally at the School for Specialists. All of us students were not used to such early wake-up calls and to the speed needed to wash up and dress oneself to be on time for the morning rally outside our living quarters.

That first morning Lieutenant Cioffi was losing his patience with the men who were late. When it appeared that all the men were finally standing in line, one young student wearing only pajamas ran out of a dormitory door. The new aviators standing at attention couldn't help themselves from exploding in laughter while the man in pajamas, without the slightest embarrassment, tried to get in line with the others.

Pointing angrily at the student in pajamas, Lieutenant Cioffi shouted with outrage in his voice, "To prison! To prison!" Then he inquired of the sergeant who was holding the list of new students, "What is his name?"

"That's ... Zaccaria," replied the sergeant.

On the first day Zaccaria went to military prison. Later he became well known under the name of Bum-Bum because of his habit of singing *sotto voce* to himself and one could hear only a rhythmic sound of "Bum-bum... Bum-bum..." as he was singing his tune.

On the first of December 1935 I graduated from the Air Force School for Specialists. It was a solemn occasion for the graduating students, commemorated in our class photograph<sup>4</sup> in front of the building of the Air Force School for Specialists in Capodichino.

Upon graduation, I was given the rank of Airman Radio-Telegrapher and my

military pay was 127 liras a month. I kept the twenty-seven liras for my expenses and every month mailed one hundred liras to my mother for as long as I was in the service. I felt that, although I didn't live at home anymore, it was my duty to continue contributing to the family income, as I did before according to the rules established by my parents.

After completion of the course at the Air Force School for Specialists, all participants were sent to different locations to join the existing squadrons. I was assigned to join the 192nd Squadron of Terrestrial Bombardment and was sent there with a group of other airmen, including Zaccaria, who did not pass the exams in radiotelegraphy. At that time the 192nd Squadron of Terrestrial Bombardment was stationed at the Seaplane Base at Puntisella, not far from the town of Pola.<sup>5</sup> The commandant of the squadron was Captain Antonio Celotto.

As soon as we arrived at the base, we heard from the old-timers that the captain had been transferred there from a squadron of fighter planes where as a pilot he landed recklessly and broke the plane. After that incident he was given the nickname Antonio lo Scassa,<sup>6</sup> which stuck to him and, as long as I remember, the airmen under his command called him by that name among themselves.

At our arrival the commandant of the squadron assigned me as a radiotelegrapher to Plane Number 4. In a few days after our arrival the 192nd Squadron was transferred to another Seaplane Base, this time near Brindisi,<sup>7</sup> where we had our living quarters in a hangar next to the seashore. There we received training on the S.55 seaplanes, which were so old that they couldn't fly higher than one thousand meters. But on the average our flights were at altitudes between 200 and 500 meters.

At the base there were very few maintenance personnel and the crew had to pull the seaplane out of the water, place it on a platform with wheels, push the platform on the ground, and clean the seaplane. We were giving a hard time to the old warrant officer who was in charge of seaplanes maintenance. After the seaplanes were in place, we would run away, leaving the old man the cleaning task. He would come to the platform and bang on the boat-landing part assuming that we were hiding there and patiently say, "I saw you, I saw you... Get out from there and clean the plane..."

I remember also that Zaccaria was assigned as a helper to the mechanic who was servicing another seaplane in our squadron. The mechanic did try his best to teach Bum-Bum to help him clean the spark plugs in the motors of the planes. He patiently showed him how to remove them and place the parts in sequential order, explaining that this was important for putting them back together. Well, Bum-Bum always managed to mix up the order and scatter the parts all over. The mechanic repeatedly complained about this to the commandant of our squadron, Captain Cellotto, and told him that he could do it much quicker by himself, rather than getting all upset with that moron.

Finally, Captain called Zaccaria and told him, "The mechanic doesn't want you anymore. I don't know what to do with you. Commandant of the Base assigned you to me—I am responsible for you. So, do me a big favor, and be there every morning for the rally to be accounted for! After the rally I don't want to know where you are and what you are doing. Just disappear and keep out of trouble; as long as I don't hear complaints about you!"

Our squadron was stationed at the Brindisi Seaplane Base until the end of April 1936. Our assignments were to make recognizance flights of ships at sea, radiotelegraphic communications, and simulated raids and bombardments with fake

bombs.

The rumors were that we were waiting for orders to be transferred further south, to the seaplane base in Augusta on the Island of Sicily,<sup>8</sup> to be closer to the Island of Malta.<sup>9</sup> At that time the Italian troops were conquering a colony for Italy in Africa and destroying the Ethiopian kingdom.<sup>10</sup> This act of aggression was not accepted favorably by many other European states; it especially resulted in political tensions between England and Italy. And there were rumors that Mussolini<sup>11</sup> was contemplating bombing English military bases on Malta in case of hostilities. Fortunately, that order never came and war with England was not declared at that time.

Being young and curious to see new countries and places that I knew only by name, in my imagination I expected all kinds of adventures and requested several times that the captain send me to Africa, but I was always denied the transfer.

"Why do you refuse to send me there?" I insisted, wanting to hear the reason from the Captain.

His answer was very simple, "I like to keep all good men with me. I send only troublemakers and slackers to Africa."

So I remained in Brindisi and never had a chance to see Africa.

To find other entertainment beside playing cards, the enlisted men had to go from the base to the town of Brindisi. There, one could go to the movies, or spend an evening in a bar or cafe hoping to find the company of young women. But we soon found out that the southern customs were much different from those in northern Italy. In southern Italy the families strict relatives chaperoned their young girls and didn't allow the young men to come close to them. Even in the movie theater they would sit the young girls between the two chaperones. The only women one could find in town were the women of easy virtue.

The seaplane base was located on a promontory into the sea with a narrow strip of water dividing it from the town on the mainland. To get into the town by land took a good hour and a half, but across the water it took about ten minutes of rowing by a fisherman on a small fishing boat. I remember that during the summer, at night, when we were returning from the town on the boat, as the old fisherman was rowing, the splashing of oars created an effervescent effect with the glittering droplets of water that, like a broken string of pearls, were falling and disappearing into the sea. This phenomenon was caused by some microscopic phosphorescent marine life particular to that narrow strip of water.

In June 1936 our squadron was transferred to the Military Airport Base at Poggio Renatico,<sup>12</sup> where we underwent training on the newest Savoia S.81, the three-engine heavy bombers. There we remained about one month waiting for the completion of the new military airport in Forli,<sup>13</sup> which unofficially was called Mussolini's Airport because it was located not far from Mussolini's native village, Rocca della Caminate.

Finally, in the beginning of July 1936 we were transferred to the new military airport in Forli. There we were organized in an XXX Formation consisting of four squadrons, 192nd, 193rd, 194th, and 195th. Some airmen were transferred out of our formation, while others were assigned to take their places. There the new Commandant, Captain Pilot Giuseppe Noziglia, was assigned to our squadron.

It was at that time that the radiotelegrapher Pierin<sup>14</sup> Panzeri was assigned to our 192nd Squadron to another airplane. He became my friend right away. We had lots of

fun together in our free time from duties and during the weekends on leave in town. Our friendship grew over the years that we served in the same squadron.

Pierin was born in England, where his father worked as a valet in a hotel. His family returned to Italy when he was very young and they settled in his parent's native hamlet Sottoripa di Pondida, located near the town of Bergamo in northwestern Italy.

From what Pierin told me about his life I understood that they maintained many customs, which they had gotten used to while living in England. It was especially funny for me that they had a habit of drinking tea, which at that time wasn't the custom of Italian common folks.

For some reason Pierin felt that his parents didn't love him. On those occasions when he drank a little bit more wine than usual, he would start to cry and to complain that he was born unfortunate and unwanted by his parents and that they never loved him. But when he was not under the influence of alcohol he never mentioned anything specific about his treatment by his parents that would support this idea.

Pierin was a good-natured and simple young man. He had less education than I and was not as fond of books as I was. He told me that as he was growing up, he read very few books, except those required in school. Now, he occasionally read some magazines. He liked to play cards and billiards and on these pastimes we got along with each other very well.

At the airport of Forli we received flight training on the new Savoia S.81 heavy bombers that were appreciated for their capacity to carry a heavy ammunition load, for autonomy in navigation, and for ease of handling the airplane. They were also equipped with the new radio-goniometer<sup>15</sup> that was a radio-wave beam direction-finder; the instrument could locate a flying airplane and its flight direction. Therefore, all radiotelegraphers had to learn how to operate this new equipment.

In order not to disrupt the service of the squadrons, one radiotelegrapher at a time was sent for a week to Milan<sup>16</sup> to the training center at the military airport of Malpensa. It was a big place with servicemen from all over Italy coming and going every day like on a large railroad station. From my previous experience of such transit places I knew that shoes and clothing could be stolen very easily; therefore, I brought with me only what I could wear on my body. To be sure that it wouldn't disappear during the night when I was asleep, I would put on the head side one leg of my bunk bed in each shoe and put my well-folded pants and jacket under my pillow. Well, this trick also worked this time.

When I returned to the Base at the Airport of Forli, I found out that Bum-Bum had found himself a new occupation; he was taking care of the little pet monkey that belonged to the commandant of his squadron. Later, as usual, he got himself into more trouble. One day he went on leave in the town of Forli and brought back a bicycle, which he immediately repainted another color. After a few days he went back to town and stopped at the same bar where he had stolen the bicycle from some customer who was drunk. This time the owner of the bicycle was quite sober and was waiting for the thief to show up. He recognized the bicycle and went to complain to the commandant. This time Bum-Bum went too far and was put in prison. We never saw him again.

Speaking about the bicycle reminds me that while at the huge airport of Forli I saved enough money from my military pay, after mailing the rest to my family, to buy my first bicycle, which allowed me to move from our living quarters to the hangars and to

the mess hall much faster, especially during the hot summer months.

On July 16, 1936 I completed 81 hours and 50 minutes of in-flight training and was reassigned to the 193rd Squadron. We were stationed at the Airport of Forli until the end of October 1937. At the end of July 1937 the commandant of our squadron, Captain Pilot Giuseppe Noziglia, was transferred and in his place Captain G. De Cecco was appointed.

On the Savoia S.81 bombers we were able to stay much longer in the air and could fly at much higher altitudes, from 1000 meters up to 5,600 meters. We also had very good pilots who were flying our airplanes. It was a pleasure to fly with them because they knew how to handle the planes during takeoffs, landings, and in the air. From the records in my Personal Book of Flight I was able to recall all their names, some of which had vanished from my memory with the passing of time: Cornell Pilot Bonomi, Lieutenant Cornell Pilot Bonini, Lieutenant Pilots Terracciano and Zannier, and Major Pilot Palessa; also Captain Pilots: De Cecco, Noziglia, Simoni, Maramaldo; and Second Lieutenant Pilots: Rotolo, Pini, Franzini, Patterniani, and Vecchi.

We had all kinds of military exercises: recognizance flights over land and sea; patrols of one squadron, or of two or three planes; missions with the whole formation; bombardment simulations on the target field with bombs made out of cement; and machine gun exercises in the marshes of Puglia, where we would fly at a very low altitude and scare the buffalos, who would run as fast as they could when they heard the sounds of our motors and machine gun rounds.

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1. A suburb of the city of Naples in west-central Italy.
  2. The lower ranks in the Italian Air Force were: *Aviere* - Airman, *Aviere Scelto* - Select Airman, *Primo Aviere* - First Airman.
  3. *Libretto Personale di Volo, Ministero dell'Aeronautica, Napoli*, June 5, 1935.
  4. From the photo of the graduating class of the Air Force School for Specialists in Capodichino.
  5. Seaplane base on the Adriatic Sea in northeastern Italy in the region of Istria.
  6. "Antonio the Wrecker."
  7. A town in the southeastern Italy in the region of Puglia.
  8. An island in the Mediterranean Sea in southern Italy.
  9. An island in the Mediterranean Sea, under the British rule.
  10. The war with Ethiopia started on October 3, 1935. The Italian troops entered Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia on May 5, 1936.
  11. First Minister of Italy and *Il Duce*, the leader of the Italian Fascist party.
  12. In central Italy, region of Emilia, south of the town of Ferrara.
  13. Town in central Italy, region of Emilia.
  14. Diminutive of Piero.
  15. An instrument for measuring angles, especially of solid bodies.
  16. City in northern Italy in the region of Lombardia.

## Volunteer In the Legionary Air Force

As Remembered by Giulio Verro  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

During the period when I was in training at the Airport Base of Forli, the civil war

had been going on for some time in another European country of Spain. First, the Spanish communists got rid of the king and established the Republic. Their government had strong opposition from the noncommunist-minded citizens. General Franco<sup>1</sup> began fighting the Republic government from the territory of Spanish Morocco,<sup>2</sup> where there was a military revolt against the government of Madrid. Franco used mercenary troops of the Foreign Legion, who were all volunteers, and as he was conquering Spanish territory he was drafting young Spanish men to serve in his army.

Right from the beginning Italian *Duce* Benito Mussolini had supported General Franco, who wanted to establish a fascist regime in Spain. And German Fuhrer Adolf Hitler<sup>3</sup> was also sympathetic to the cause of General Franco. But according to international agreements they could not officially interfere with the civil war in another country and send their regular troops to Spain. They found a way to help Franco by sending servicemen from their armed forces as “volunteers” in the Foreign Legion. It was not a secret that this was going on, but the international community, which was not too happy with the communist takeover in Spain, was allowing the masquerade to go on.

Only the Soviet Union, France, and Czechoslovakia openly supported the communist government in Spain. Through the ports of France, which had a very permissive policy, these countries were helping the Republican communist government with volunteers, arms, and military supplies. The International Brigades formed from idealistic volunteers and adventurers from France and other countries joined the Republican side to fight. Garibaldi's battalion within the International Brigade included Italian antifascists in exile.

At the military airport of Forlì it was known that several squadrons of the Italian Air Force had already served and returned from Spain. Among the first squadrons who volunteered were the famous squadrons called *Sorci Verdi*<sup>4</sup> and “The Dragoons of Death.” Their fame was used for propaganda purposes as an example to be followed by the other squadrons. Therefore, we were not surprised when in the first week of November 1937 our formation was called for an assembly in a hangar and we were presented with the choice of going to Spain as volunteers. We were offered higher pay, an experience in real warfare, and an opportunity to earn extra hours of flight in combat.

The commander of our squadron, Captain de Cecco, was the first to volunteer and was followed by almost all airmen from our squadron, with the exception of a few who were substituted with volunteers from the other squadrons.

Pierin Panzeri and I didn't think too long about it; politically we were unsophisticated, and we volunteered too. Young as we were, an adventure appealed to us and, after the monotony of the established routine at the base, we were ready to finally get into real action. An additional incentive was the chance to see new places and have fun with extra money in our pockets.

Another squadron from our formation followed our example, which completed a group of two squadrons ready to go to Spain.

Before departure most of our airmen were promoted. As a specialist radiotelegrapher I was promoted to the rank of *Aviere Scelto*,<sup>5</sup> as it is listed in our Airplane Number 4 “Book of Station,”<sup>6</sup> which remained in my possession.

As radiotelegrapher one of my duties was to keep a record of all Airplane Number 4 missions. From the entries I was able to reconstruct the exact dates, times and targets of our squadron's military missions for that period and I found many details

of our flights during our campaign in Spain. For easy reference, I kept the names of towns, islands, and other geographical names in Spanish as they were recorded at that time. I found additional information from the records of my military service in the "Excerpts of Peacetime Flights"<sup>7</sup> and in the "Excerpts of Wartime Flights"<sup>8</sup> that were verified and signed by the commandant of our squadron, Captain Pilot G. De Cecco.

In the "Book of Station" my entries started in Forli on February 24, 1937. On the very top of the page dated November 12, 1937, which was the day of our departure for Spain, I wrote in Spanish *Todo per la Patria*<sup>9</sup> and underlined it, as if I intended it to serve as a title for the entries that would follow. All entries at that time were written in a code that was changed often and I couldn't decipher now. However, starting on the day of our departure from the Military Airport of Forli, parts of the records were written in plain Italian.

The commander of our group of two squadrons was Cornell Drago. The takeoff from the Airport of Forli was sharp at 10:00 in the morning. The commandant of our squadron, Captain Pilot G. De Cecco, was piloting our Savoia S.81 heavy bomber; Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano was the Second Pilot. In one hour and twenty minutes we landed at the Airport of Montecelio in Rome.

In one week our group had undergone a complete metamorphosis from being airmen in the Italian Air Force to being civilians and volunteers in the Foreign Legion. Our squadron changed its name and number from the 192nd Squadron of Terrestrial Bombardment of the Italian Air Force to 251st Squadron of Terrestrial Nocturnal Bombardment in the Legionary Air Force.

Our airplanes also changed their insignia. The insignia of the Italian Air Force, the national tricolor green-white-and-red stripes, on the rudder of the tail were removed and in its place the insignia of the Legionary Air Force, the black cross of Saint Andrew, was painted.

For the duration of the travel from Italy to Spain all airmen had to wear civilian clothing and they all had received civilian passports with fictitious last names, while the first names remained the same. I was given a passport in the name of Giulio Villani.

At 10:50 on the morning of November 20, 1937 our group of two squadrons, the 251st and 252nd, of four planes each, took off from Monticello Airport. On route we had only coded communications with the ground bases and with the airplane of the commandant of our group Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano. He ordered our Pilot Captain de Cecco to fly over the clouds at the altitude of 2,500 meters.

At 12:36 in the afternoon we landed on the Island of Sardinia<sup>10</sup> at the large Military Airport of Elmas, where we stayed overnight and refueled our airplanes. The next morning on November 21 at 10:30 our group took off from the Airport of Elmas in a westerly direction toward the Balearic Islands.<sup>11</sup> Our final destination was the Spanish military airport on the Island of Mallorca<sup>12</sup> that was already under control of the National Army of General Franco. On route we had only coded communications and were flying at an altitude of 4,500 meters. That afternoon, after three hours and forty minutes of flight, we landed at the military airport of San Bonnet on the Island of Mallorca.

The military airport of San Bonnet was located on the outskirts of the small hamlet San Bonnet, about a half-hour bus-ride from the town of Palma de Mallorca. The living quarters for the legionnaires of our XXV Group B.N.<sup>13</sup> were in the school next to the airport. All accommodations were already there as they had been left by another

group of Italian legionnaires who had recently returned home.

As soon as we arrived, we were given khaki uniforms with an emblem of Legionary Air Force wings. We were all given new documents in exchange for our Italian passports. I was issued a military ID Card Number 7985, for the United Legionary Air Force in the name of Giulio Villani, *Cabo Radiotelegrafista*.<sup>14</sup> It was stamped with an official seal of the General Command of the Balearic General Staff<sup>15</sup> and authorized the bearer free movement in the territory occupied by the National Army and an authorization to bear arms.

Our two squadrons, the 251st and 252nd, belonged to the XXV Group of Heavy Bombardment named "*Pipistrelli*"<sup>16</sup> and its command headquarters were stationed on the continental part of Spain that was already occupied by the National Army.

To distinguish our two squadrons from the rest of the group we were called "*Pipistrelli delle Baleari*."<sup>1</sup> We had assignments of flying the nocturnal bombardments, or B.N. missions, on those nights when there was enough moonlight to provide us with visibility of the targets on the ground, while providing us with the safety of the darkness in the sky. Our Savoia S.81 three-engine heavy bombers were too slow for a daytime bombardment when we could have been an easy target for the enemy fighter airplanes in the sky and the anti-aircraft guns from the ground.

The other Italian Air Force squadrons who were also camouflaged as a Legionary Air Force did the daytime bombardment missions. They had Savoia S.79 bombers, which at that time were considered to be the best in Europe for speed and maneuverability for the daytime bombardments.

Also on the Island of Mallorca at the Airport of Son San Juan another Italian squadron of CR.32 *Caccia Rosarelli* fighter airplanes was stationed and in the harbor of Palma de Mallorca was the base of one Italian submarine; both masqueraded as legionary units of the National Armed Forces. The command headquarters of these units were located in the city of Palma de Mallorca and all officers lived there in hotels.

On November 25, 1937, after only four days since our arrival here, we made a two-and-a-half hour reconnaissance flight over the coast of Ibiza, the Island of Formetera, Cape San Antonio, and the Island of Columbretes at an altitude of 2,500 meters. Major Pilot Fiore was in command of our plane. Thereafter we had a two-week span of no flights, as recorded in the "Book of Station." During that period we settled in our living quarters and completed maintenance on our airplanes and equipment, getting everything ready for the air bombardments.

On December 7, 1937 the Reds bombarded the city of Palma de Mallorca.<sup>17</sup> Most bombs fell on the residential area of the city, damaging houses. Their targets probably were the general staff headquarters of the Balearic and the command headquarters of the Legionary Air Force, both located in the city. When Pierin and I visited the city after the bombardment, we saw some of the buildings destroyed by the bombs. As a souvenir I asked our Air Force photographer to give me several photographs made by him immediately after the air raid. For us it was the first glimpse of the destructive power of bombs.

On December 8, 1937 we were ordered to get ready for our first bombardment. It was a daytime mission. Our target was the Airfield of Mahon on the island of Minorca. We had on board ten 100-kilogram bombs. Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano was in command of the patrol. The takeoff was at 11:40<sup>18</sup> in the morning. Weather was good

with 5/10 cloudiness. On board everything was well. At 12:31 we reached our target and dropped the bombs. Our airplane was hit with three splinters of antiaircraft shells, which made holes toward the tail. This was the only daytime bombardment that we made during the Spanish campaign. We learned right away that the other side, the Republicans, or as they were more commonly called the Reds, had and knew how to use the antiaircraft guns.

The next few days we stayed on the ground, repaired the holes in our airplane, completed routine maintenance on our radio equipment, and changed batteries. Pierin and I took a bus to Palma de Mallorca. The weather was good and we explored the town, visited some sites of recent bombardment, and found the movie theater and a coffee house where we could play billiards.

On the morning of December 11, 1937 we made a short fifteen-minute flight from the airport of San Bonnet to the Airport of Son San Juan and back. Then the same evening we were ordered to get ready for the second bombardment under the command of Captain Pilot de Cecco. This time our target was Barcelona. We had on board ten 100-kilogram bombs. The takeoff was at 17:30. Weather was good. At 18:10 all was well on board. We were flying at an altitude of 4,000 meters and dropped the bombs from that height. It was a long two-and-a-half-hour nocturnal flight over territory unknown to us. We safely landed at 19:50.

The next day, on December 12, we made two routine flights from the Airport of San Bonnet to the Airport of Son San Juan and back. The rest of the week that followed we stayed on the ground. Probably the nocturnal visibility on the ground was not sufficient either from the moonlight, or from excessive cloudiness, and was not favorable for flying nocturnal bombardment missions.

We had plenty of time to rest and get to know the city of Palma de Mallorca and its places of entertainment. This time we stayed there until late at night. We went to a *cafe tabarain* called Il Trocadero, a place that was recommended to us by the other legionaries, where wine was good and there was light entertainment with music and dance. One could also find there young women who kept company with legionaries and showered the lonely young men with attention. When Pierin and I walked in, a young woman by the name of Pachita sat at our table, chatted with us, and we treated her with wine. That week we also went to the movies where legionaries were admitted free of charge and could sit in the first rows of the theater.

On December 19, 1937 we received an order to get ready for our third bombardment. Our target was again Barcelona. We had on board ten bombs of 100 kilograms each. The patrol was under the command of Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano. Takeoff was at 19:53. We flew at an altitude of 4,000 meters. At 21:15 we reached the target and dropped bombs on Barcelona. There was a grand fire on the coast. I counted seven searchlights that were hunting us. Numerous antiaircraft guns were aiming at us, but their shots were completely off target. However, the fiery trajectories were spectacular. We returned to the base without any incidents and landed safely.

On December 22, 1937 it was my twenty-second birthday. We were ordered to get ready to fly that night. It was our fourth bombardment. This time the target was Valencia. We were carrying twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. The commandant of the patrol was again Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano. Takeoff was at 23:30. On board everything was regular. At 00:20 we were flying at an altitude of 3,450 meters. I reported

again that all was fine on board. However, one could not see anything under us but an enormous screen of clouds. Valencia was covered with clouds but there was one small window of clearance. At 00:55 we reached the target and dropped the bombs. I counted ten searchlights that were persistently searching under the clouds. There were numerous antiaircraft artillery; their shots exploded illuminating, or rather reddening, the clouds underneath us. Their effect was magnificent, but my "funk meter" measuring a degree of fear was marking high on the scale of 100. I had the impression of seeing a monoplane just above the clouds and we ran immediately toward the machine guns, but we didn't have to use them. At 01:35 we were navigating by radio beacon. So far everything was well. We landed at 02:20. It was a night that would not be forgotten because our Airplane Number 2 got lost over the sea. It found the island after six hours in flight.

The next five days we again stayed on the ground because of bad weather. We celebrated Christmas at Il Trocadero together with some members of our crew. There were Bombardier Sergeant-Major Armita, First Flight Engineer Sergeant-Major Campello, Second Flight Engineer Sergeant-Major Trevisano, Gunner First Airman Guidi, and radiotelegraphers Select Airman Pierin Panzeri and I, Select Airman Giulio Verro. And there were many other members of our group from Pierin's airplane crew, whose names I don't recall now. We drank plenty of Spanish wine, enjoyed music, dancing, and the company of women. The same young woman, Pachita, began to show too much interest in me, almost courting me, but I didn't care much about her.

The same week we were advised not to visit Il Trocadero again. It was brought to the attention of our officers that many of the patrons of Il Trocadero were either suspected communists or their sympathizers, or maybe their spies. Our superiors worried about our personal safety, but the possibility of revealing information about the targets of our missions was also an important concern; divulging that information would endanger the whole patrol during the bombardment missions.

Only on December 28 we had a two-hour daytime visual reconnaissance flight with Major Pilot Fiore over the Cape of Saint Antonio on the Spanish coast. We were flying at an altitude of 3,450 meters. With the overcast sky and some drizzle we traveled between one cloud and another. For the next few days the cloudy weather continued and we stayed on the ground.

On December 30, 1937 we had an aborted mission. It was an attempted bombardment. Our target was Barcelona. We had on board fourteen bombs of 50 kilograms each. The takeoff was at 04:00. After fifteen minutes of flight we had to return to the base because of the adverse atmospheric conditions of haze and cloudiness. We landed at 04:30 with all the cargo of bombs on board. It was dangerous landing and, although we trusted our pilot, Lieutenant Terracciano, we were holding our breath until the last second when we stopped.

The bad weather allowed us again to celebrate the New Year. I had discovered on Dei Sindacati Street a very small pastry shop where one could buy pastries and a glass of Malaga or Sherry wine and have refreshment in the shop. In addition to these delights of the palate, I found another attraction, a young and gentle salesgirl by the name Margarita. She was about my age, slim and tall, with black hair and dark eyes. I got a big crush on her and began to patronize the pastry shop on every occasion I could get into town.

Only on January 7, 1938 the weather allowed us to fly again. It was our fifth bombardment. Our target was the railway and road junction of Estivello at the Mount of Sagunto. We were carrying ten bombs of 100 kilograms each. The commander of the patrol was Major Pilot Fiore. Takeoff was at 16:30. Everything was regular on board; weather was good. In the "Book of Station" I wrote: "It is a magnificent evening. I am admiring the sunset from 3,000 meters over the sea. Far away the sky is purple-red. We have the enemy coast in sight. At 18:05 we reached our objective. There is complete calm on the target. The anti-aircraft guns of first line of defense began shooting at us at the coast. Some were excellent shots. I saw also shots from a machine gun that resembled flying red chestnuts. There were only three searchlights. We dropped the bombs from an altitude of 1000 meters. Mission accomplished. We are returning to the base. We landed at 20:30."

We had only two days for maintenance on our airplane and equipment and two nights to rest. On January 11, 1938 we were ordered to get ready for the sixth bombardment. Our mission was bombardment and machine gun fire at a low altitude on a span of the road Teruel to Sagunto. On board we had fifty-six bombs of 15 kilograms each. The commander of the mission was Major Pilot Fiore. Takeoff was at 17:15. It was hazy at the horizon, illuminated by the last rays of sunset. We followed the same route as on the previous mission to Sagunto. At 18:55 we dropped the bombs. There was a long column of military trucks, which we showered with two hundred rounds of machine gun fire. We hit the mark very well from an altitude of 700 meters. Very strange, there was not even one searchlight. It was a long flight of three hours. We landed at 20:15.

On January 12, 1938 we flew a reconnaissance by sight in the morning at the coast of Ibiza with Second Lieutenant Pilot Pini and in the afternoon made a short flight from San Bonnet to Son San Juan with Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano.

On January 13, 1938 we were ordered to get ready to fly the seventh bombardment mission. Our targets were two bridges leading from Almasora toward Segunto. On board we had four bombs of 250 kilograms each. The commander of our patrol was Second Lieutenant Pilot Rotolo. Takeoff was at 19:30. On the island the weather was mediocre. At 19:45 we had lost sight of the head of the patrol while navigating in a dense bank of clouds at an altitude of 1,100 meters. At 19:55 the head of the patrol was still not visible and we feared that he might have returned to the base, but we haven't received any notice or orders from the base. We continued on our route. The sky was now clear and visibility near the target was very good. At 21:00 we dropped the bombs. From the ground there was no resistance, not even one shot from anti-aircraft guns. As we were returning to the base the cloudiness increased. At 22:10 we were over the island, but the airfield was not visible because of very low clouds. At 22:15 the airfield had become illuminated and we landed.

On January 15th we flew from San Bonnet to Son San Juan and the next day to Salines with Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano. For the next five days we were on the ground servicing our planes and equipment. I had time to make several visits to the pastry shop. Between one customer and another I could exchange a few words with Margarita. She told me that both of her brothers were drafted, one by the Republican Army, or the Reds as they were called, and another by the National Army of General Franco. She was worrying about them, especially about the one who was with the Reds because the

family hadn't had any news from him for a long time.

On January 21, 1938 we received orders to get ready for the eighth bombardment mission. The target was the line of communication and the road from Valencia to Cullena.<sup>19</sup> On board were twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. We had seven persons aboard; among them were Cornell Martire from the headquarters and our group commander, Lieutenant Cornell Drago. Takeoff was at 03:00. It was a long flight to the target at an altitude of 3,600 meters. We attacked the city at 05:05. There were no searchlights or anti-aircraft shelling. We found complete calm on the ground. Far away I could see a huge fire maybe caused by the previous daytime bombardment.

The next day, on January 22, 1938, we were ordered to fly again. It was our ninth bombardment mission. The target was the Port of Valencia. We had on board twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. Our pilot was Lieutenant Terracciano. Takeoff was at 03:25. We reached the target at 04:10. This time we had an excellent reception. The alarm was given before we reached the city. There were eight searchlights and numerous anti-aircraft guns. Nevertheless, willing or unwilling, we had to drop the bombs over the searchlights and get out in a hurry. At 04:20 we were on our way to the base. Everything went all right. The searchlights touched us in crossing the sky without noticing our plane and did not provide the anti-aircraft guns with the target. The big fire that I had noticed the night before was still burning in full force. It was again a very long flight. We returned to the base as the dawn was breaking, revealing magnificent Aurora over the sea.

We had the next twelve nights without flying bombardment missions. Probably it was a period without moonlight. However, we made several daytime flights with Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano from San Bonnet to Son San Juan and to Salinas. We serviced our planes and equipment and I had plenty of time during the day to visit Margarita in the bakery shop. If my father could only see all those pastries that I was eating there, he would probably say that I completely forgot his preaching that eating sweets would ruin my teeth. Of course, at that time I was not thinking about that. I was content to have a few minutes of Margarita's attention between one customer and another. My courtship during that time was limited to seeing her in the shop and getting to know her better.

Meanwhile, Pierin and I had time in the evenings to play a few games of billiards in the small local coffee shop, to play cards in the lounge of our living quarters, or go to the movies. During the day we were also practicing with the soccer team and had competitions with the legionaries stationed at the Airport of Son San Juan. I also had time to write letters home and to read somewhat outdated Italian newspapers and magazines, which were arriving on the ships bringing the mail from Italy and replacement volunteers for those who were returning home. We also had time to improve our Spanish, which allowed us to communicate with the locals quite well with the help of some Italian words.

On February 8, 1938 we were notified to get ready for our tenth bombardment mission. The target was an industrial complex of high furnaces in Sagunto. We had on board ten mine bombs of 100 kilograms each. The pilot was Lieutenant Terracciano. Takeoff was at 17:20. The weather on the island was good, but there were massive white clouds on the horizon. Sunset was almost over. We were flying at an altitude of 3,000 meters toward the left of Valencia. The alarm in the city had been given well in

advance of our arrival and stirred up very strong antiaircraft reaction. In my judgment, this was the strongest reaction that we had seen so far. The shots were efficient at various altitudes. Ten potent searchlights were completing the spectacle. Therefore, we turned away from the city to find another way to approach the target. We reached the target at 18:50. On the ground there were three searchlights, one machine gun, and three antiaircraft guns. We dropped the bombs and at 19:15 were on our way back to the base, but we lost contact with the leader of our air patrol and were flying by radio beam. Aboard, everything was regular. We landed at 20:20.

On February 10, 1938 at 6:25 in the morning we flew out to the sea on a visual reconnaissance mission to police enemy shores in the sector of Dragonera, Valencia, and Barcelona. The pilot was Lieutenant Terracciano. The sky was covered with clouds and it was drizzling. We were flying at an altitude of 2,500 meters. At 7:21 the sky cleared up and we could see the Island of Corubrette far away. We returned and landed at 10:30.

After our last mission there were no entries in "The Book of Station" for twenty-four days. I don't recall the reason for it; maybe it was only our airplane grounded, or maybe it was due to bad weather and moonless nights. The warm spring weather allowed us to form soccer teams and we had plenty of time to practice on the green field of San Bonnet. Also this was probably the period when I had time to take Margarita to the movies and have some short walks with her. I was in love, but our relationship did not go beyond a few kisses and we exchanged photographs.

On March 2, 1938 we flew another visual reconnaissance mission over the sector of Dragonera, Valencia, and Barcelona, and on March 3 off the shores of Castellon de la Plana. On both missions the pilot was Lieutenant Terracciano.

On March 6, 1938 our mission was an intervention in the skies over the National Fleet during a naval battle. In "The Book of Station" I wrote: "Last night the Spanish ship 'Baleares' was sunk. We are departing at about 7:00 in the morning to search for the enemy fleet. We have only three airplanes each carrying five 100 kilograms bombs. On my airplane we have Commandant of our Group Cornell Drago and Cornell of the Spanish National Air Force. At takeoff the weather was very good. At 9:20 we discern in the distance a group of five warships. One in the center is probably the ship 'Canarias' and the others placed around in a circle should be the English inspection ships. There is also a large oil spot visible on the water's surface. At 9:30 we were flying at an altitude of 2,500 meters. The ships made a warning sign with one minute of antiaircraft fire in our direction. We have to turn toward the open sea. There is no sign of the Red Fleet. The large mass of clouds under us interfered with visibility for a while. Then it cleared up and we were able to observe the Red coast. It was very possible that the Red ships found refuge at the port of Cartagena and we could not find them. We landed at the base at 10:30 with the load of bombs on board."

On March 11, 1938 we flew a reconnaissance mission with Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano to the Islands of Columbrette and Alcocebre. Visibility was mediocre from an altitude of 4,300 meters.

After three days, the nocturnal visibility improved and we were ordered on March 15, 1938 to fly the eleventh bombardment mission. The target was a coastal road, Vinaroz to Torreblanca, in the direction of Saint Carlos. We were carrying twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. On board we had the Commandant of our Group Lieutenant

Cornell Drago. Two air patrols departed before us carrying bombs of 250 kilograms each for the famous bridges of Sagunto. At 20:15 we took off toward our target. It was a magnificent evening with a full moon. At 21:20 we reached the target. There was complete calm on the ground and no anti-aircraft reaction. We accomplished our mission from an altitude of 1,000 meters without any interference from the ground. At 21:30 we were on our way to the base. We landed at 22:15.

The next night, on March 16, 1938, we were ordered to fly again. It was our twelfth bombardment. Lieutenant Cornell Drago was on our plane. Each airplane in our patrol was carrying four bombs of 250 kilograms each and propaganda leaflets<sup>20</sup> for the population. All this cargo had to be dropped on Barcelona. I wrote in "The Book of Station": "It will be the night of hell for this city. We have three patrols that should alternate in the attack on the city. All together about thirty-six bombs of 250 kilograms each will be dropped that should hit the target."

We took off at 22:00. The weather was excellent. We were flying at an altitude of 4,100 meters. At 23:20 we were over our target. The air raid warning was given a long time before our arrival. We attacked from hinterland to be in the right direction for the return to the base after dropping the bombs. There was a terrible reaction from the anti-aircraft artillery. The shells were exploding on all altitudes. There were thirteen very potent searchlights scouting the sky. Our bombs produced enormous blazes. At 23:30 we were on our way to our base without any damages to our planes.

On March 17, 1938 we were ordered to get ready to fly again. It was our thirteenth bombardment. Lieutenant Terracciano was piloting our plane. We had four bombs aboard of 250 kilograms each. Our target was again Barcelona. In "The Book of Station" I wrote my thoughts: "For sure, in this city there is a reign of terror. All day today the S.79ts flew there to drop bombs. Now there are two patrols of S.81ts in flight and we are the third patrol waiting to take off at 02:45. The weather is good and everything aboard is regular. We are flying at an altitude of 4,000 meters. At 04:00 we are over Barcelona. They were not tired yet of shooting at us from the ground. I counted the same thirteen searchlights and saw the same enormous blazes from our bombs. Poor city! It was only a short while ago that we landed and there are three S.79ts with their motors on, ready to start their turn."

March 18, 1938. We were flying again! It was our fourteenth bombardment. This time we were going in pursuit of the Red Troops' Command, which seems to be hiding at Tortosa. We had aboard four bombs of 250 kilograms each and leaflets. Lieutenant Terracciano was piloting our plane. We took off at 01:45. Weather was good. It was a long flight and at 02:30 I wrote in "The Book of Station" my thoughts: "It is curious to observe how one passes the time on board before reaching the target. One of my friends is solving crossword puzzles; the other one is absorbed in reading an Italian political journal. Once in a while we sip cognac to fight the cold, which is very intense at the altitude of 4,000 meters. Each of us is doing whatever that he can find to do! At 03:20 we reached our target and dropped the bombs. On the ground is a lot of haziness and visibility is poor. We made a perfect hit on the target. Two bombs ended up exactly on the Provincial Road. There was a complete absence of anti-aircraft reaction. At 04:13 we landed on our base."

Almost three weeks from the last mission we were on the ground without flying. I think that this was the time when our command received a warning that the Reds were

planning to bomb our airfield. The Soviet "volunteer" Air Force had already bombarded the Airport of Son San Juan before our group's arrival here. At that time, because of the advance warning, all fighter planes were removed from the airport ahead of time and saved. This time all our planes were moved to another small airport on the Island of Mallorca, and all airmen to the hotel on the beach of Manacor, where we waited until the threat of the expected bombardment was over. It was a false alarm, but our command didn't want to take chances of losing airplanes and ser-vicemen. It was a good time to relax after our previous intensive bombardment missions and we all needed a change of pace.

On our return to the base we serviced our planes and equipment and had plenty of time to rest. I was glad to have an opportunity to visit Margarita more often in the pastry shop, but each time I found several suitors there, all Italian legionaries, competing with each other for her attention. As a salesgirl she had to smile at all customers; after all, the owners were interested in selling their baked goodies, but for the young men the pastries were not the only attraction that made them come to their shop. Of course, I saw this as being threatening to what I thought by this time was an established sentimental feeling between Margarita and me. I was returning to the base bothered by these apparently innocent occurrences that were putting me in a very jealous mood.

One afternoon I returned from the pastry shop to the base really upset with those whom I considered to be my rivals for Margarita's attention. I anticipated that sharing my problems with my friend Pierin would help me to get over my disappointment. Instead, I found him all excited and in a very good mood and I had to listen to his ideas about his girl. He had just received a letter with a photograph of his young *madrina*, as we called a soldier's godmother, a kind of a pen pal who adopted him when we left for Spain. From the first letters that he received from her he became more and more interested in meeting her in person when he returned to Italy.

I also had a *madrina* who was writing to me, but I didn't have any particular interest in her. I was taken by the charm of Margarita and had no intention of giving her up. I continued to show up in the pastry shop each day when I could be free until it became obvious for some of the new suitors that Margarita favored me. But Margarita didn't like my being jealous and she told me that. In the following weeks our squadron resumed a very intensive schedule of bombardments and during that time I could not get to Palma di Mallorca to see Margarita.

On April 6, 1938 we made a daytime visual reconnaissance mission over the coast of Barcelona with Lieutenant Terracciano piloting the plane. On April 7, in the morning we flew to the Airport of Son San Juan and the same night we resumed nocturnal bombardment missions. It was our fifteenth bombardment. The target this time was a railroad station south of Tortosa and the railroad tracks between Ulldecona and Saint Barbara. We were carrying twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. Takeoff was at 19:30. Cornell Drago was aboard our plane. It was still clear daylight. The weather was good with some haziness over the sea. We were flying at an altitude of 2,000 meters. At 20:40 we reached our target. It was a bombardment of average success as some bombs fell on the adjacent road. At 20:50 we were on our way to the base and we landed at 21:52.

The next morning, on April 8, 1938 at 08:45 we were in the air on a short visual

reconnaissance mission over the Red coast of Cape Tortosa. Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano kept an altitude of 4,200 meters. The same evening of April 8, we were ordered for a nocturnal bombardment. It was our sixteenth bombardment. Again the target was south of Tortosa, the road and the railroad between Saint Barbara and Uldecona. Again we were carrying twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. Lieutenant Cornel Drago piloted the plane. Takeoff was at 19:30. The weather was good with some haziness over the sea. At 20:40 we reached the target and from an altitude of 1,400 meters dropped the bombs. On this night the action was brilliant. We had a hit right in the middle of the road and of the railroad tracks that were parallel. However, the last bombs fell on a small village. There was very scarce and inefficient reaction from the anti-aircraft guns. At 21:20 we were already flying back to the base. In "The Book of Station" I wrote: "It is a magnificent night and it is very impressive to see the reflection of this patrol of three aircraft in a wedge-shaped formation moving forward over a vast, liquid, and sometimes treacherous sea. But tonight the sea is calm, the full moon is illuminating our wings, and the mirrored image of our planes seems to be almost showing our way over calm distension of the water." At 22:00 we landed at the base.

The full moon nights had to be used as much as possible. And on April 9, 1938 we were ordered again to get ready to fly that night. It was our seventeenth bombardment. Once more our targets were the road and railroad south of Tortosa. Again we had the same load of twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. Takeoff was at 19:30. We reached the target at 21:00 and from 1,000 meters of altitude started to drop the bombs. I had never assisted at such an exciting bombardment. Not one bomb was wasted. The road and the railroad tracks were hit for a length of two kilometers. In addition, two bombs ended on the railroad station and their explosion started a fire. It was still burning when we left the shores and were on our way toward the Island of Mallorca. We landed at 21:50.

We had three days of maintenance to our aircraft and equipment. Then on April 13, 1938 we were flying again. It was our eighteenth bombardment. The targets were the road and railroad tracks from Vinaroz toward Peniscola. We had the usual twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. Lieutenant Cornel Drago was piloting our plane. Takeoff was at 21:00. Weather was mediocre, with lots of haziness and dense layers of clouds at 2,000 meters of altitude. This time we made two passes over the target at 1,200 meters of altitude, one at 22:15 and another one at 22:30. Aiming was mediocre; one bomb hit the Pier of Vinaroz. All planes landed at our base at 22:50.

On April 14, 1938 during the daytime we flew with Lieutenant Terracciano from San Bonet to Son San Juan and back and at night we were ordered for another nocturnal bombardment mission. It was our nineteenth bombardment. As on the previous night the target was at Vinaroz, the road to Saint Barbara. We had the same number and size of bombs. The pilot was Lieutenant Terracciano. The takeoff was at 21:30. The weather was stupendous and the moon was also magnificent. At 22:40 we dropped the bombs from an altitude of 1,800 meters, but with poor results. Disappointed, we headed back to the base where we safely landed at 23:50.

These full moon nights couldn't be wasted. And on April 15, 1938 we were flying again. It was our twentieth bombardment. The targets were south of Vinaroz, a road and railroad tracks to Hospitalet Perello. We had the same number of bombs of 50 kilograms each. This time we flew a patrol of four airplanes. Once more, the pilot was

Lieutenant Terracciano. Takeoff was at 23:30. The weather was very good. At 00:30 we reached the targets, which were completely covered with dense layers of clouds. We were flying just above them at 900 meters of altitude and our wheels were brushing against this fluffy mass. Aiming at the target was inexact. However, some bombs did fall on the road. We could hear very well from the airplane the dry sounds of our exploding bombs. There was no anti-aircraft reaction from the ground. We could not observe the results on the ground and headed toward our base. We landed at 01:40.

Our airplane was allowed to rest from nocturnal flying for four days. We serviced the plane and equipment and had time to go to the movies. I made a short visit to see Margarita in the pastry shop. On April 19, 1938 we flew a daytime visual reconnaissance flight over Cape Tortosa at an altitude of 4,300 meters. Our pilot again was Lieutenant Terracciano.

On April 20, 1938 we had an attempted twenty-first bombardment. The targets were the roads and railroad tracks toward Tarragona. We had the same twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. It was a Patrol of four planes. Our pilot again was Lieutenant Terracciano. The takeoff was at 01:45. Weather on the island was good. At 03:00 we were navigating at a high altitude of 3,700 meters over very dense layers of clouds. It was very cold. The clouds hindered our search for the targets. Once in a while we could see some small patches of land under us. We heard that the other airplanes in our patrol took advantage of those windows in the clouds to drop the bombs. We were navigating with all taillights on, so we would not get lost from the rest of the patrol. Our Head of the Crew decided not to drop the bombs because he was concerned that they would hit on our National troops' lines. Therefore, we returned with all ammunition aboard. At 04:05 we were approaching the island. Thanks to expert piloting by Lieutenant Terracciano, the landing with the bombs aboard was very successful.

The next night, on April 21, 1938, was our twenty-second bombardment. The targets were the roads south of Castellon de la Plana to Sagunto. We had the same twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. This time we had a patrol of five planes. Our pilot again was Lieutenant Terracciano. Takeoff was at 03:00. The weather was good. At 04:00 we were still in patrol. Under us was a dense layer of clouds, but toward the coast it looked clear. At 04:25 we reached the target and dropped the bombs. In spite of good visibility and a very low altitude of 500 meters the drops were not satisfactory. Some bombs did hit the railroad tracks and one bomb hit the road. We landed on the base at 05:45.

We were on the ground for seventeen days probably due to poor nocturnal visibility. There was plenty of time for maintenance and other housekeeping chores on our plane and equipment. There was also enough time left for the trips in town to visit Margarita and go with her to the movies. Pierin and I played a lot of billiard games and caught up with writing letters home.

I don't remember exactly if it was during this period, but it was during one of the long periods when we were not flying, an International Inspection Delegation arrived at the Legionary Headquarters in Palma de Mallorca. It was supposed to check to see if no foreign troops were stationed on the island. Since we were all wearing legionary uniforms and had filed passports identifying us as legionaries, they departed satisfied with the apparent adherence to whatever the rules of the international agreement were. It all seemed a big farce to us. It was impossible that it was not known to England and

other European countries that several squadrons from the Italian Air Force had volunteered with their airplanes. It seems that all they needed was to save appearances. It was almost obvious that most European governments preferred the Spain under the National forces of General Franco than under the Communist Republic.

In the first week of May we made a daytime flight of visual reconnaissance and flights to Son San Juan. Then on May 11, 1938 we had our twenty-third bombardment. This time the target was the Port of Valencia. We were carrying twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. Our pilot again was Lieutenant Terracciano. The takeoff was at 20:45. The weather on the island was good. We were flying at an altitude of 3,700 meters. At 21:55 we reached the target and dropped the bombs. It was a magnificent bombardment. We made a direct hit on the pier of the port causing a fire maybe, or almost certainly, on a ship. The hit was spectacular considering our altitude of 4,000 meters. There was very scarce anti-aircraft reaction. I counted seven searchlights but the anti-aircraft fire was ineffective. We landed at the base at 23:00.

On May 13, 1938 we had our twenty-fourth bombardment. The target was again the Port of Valencia. We had aboard the usual twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. And our pilot was once more Lieutenant Terracciano. Takeoff was at 21:00. The weather was mediocre. The mountains on the island were covered with thick clouds. We were flying at an altitude of 2,200 meters, climbing as we approached the target. At 22:20 we reached the target and just finished dropping the bombs. We were more skillful than I had believed. This time we made a direct hit of our target with more satisfactory results than on the previous night. Almost all bombs did fall directly on the port, where they made a huge explosion followed by a big fire. Our altitude was 3,500 meters. From the ground there was little response from the anti-aircraft guns. We landed at our base after 23:30.

There was an interruption of twenty-five days in my entries in "The Book of Station" for our Airplane Number 4. I do not recall the reason for it. It was about this time that I found out that a sailor from an Italian submarine stationed in the Harbor of Palma de Mallorca was intensively courting Margarita. I had a big quarrel with her because I expected her to be committed to me. I asked her many questions that were popping in my mind one after another. Was she assuming that by making me jealous I would promise to marry her? Or was she calculating that the sailor was a better prospect? Or was she really going out with the Italian young man just for fun? I said that I couldn't figure out what her reason was for it.

But her reply was direct and simple, "You are a very young airman. Today you are here - tomorrow you will be gone. What future is there for me with you? You cannot afford to marry me and take me to Italy because you don't have a steady job waiting there for you. I like you, but I don't want to grow too fond of you."

This incident really upset me. I behaved hastily and asked her to return my photograph and on the next day I returned her photo. We said a cold good-bye to each other and I didn't go to see her anymore.

After my sudden breakup with Margarita, I decided to make a request for a return to Italy. When I told my friend Pierin about my decision, he was glad to join me, as he was impatient to meet his *madrina*, with whom he thought he was in love by correspondence. We placed a request for a return to Italy with the commander of our group, Lieutenant Cornell Drago, and were waiting for our replacements that were to

arrive soon.

There were several days of beautiful weather on the island and Pierin and I went to a nearby small grove to collect snails, which were abundant during that time of the year. Then we asked a woman who lived next to our quarters to cook us the snails with lots of garlic and parsley. They were delicious accompanied with a good bottle of Malaga wine.

On May 30, 1938 the Reds bombarded Palma di Mallorca,<sup>21</sup> damaging the port and the pier. Some houses were also hit. There was very little overall damage done to the city compared to the bombardment of December 7, 1937. Neither airport in Son San Juan or Saint Bonnet were damaged.

For several days we flew only the reconnaissance flights. On May 30 and June 1 we flew a daytime visual reconnaissance with Lieutenant Pilot Terracciano. Both flights were at a very high altitude of 4,500 meters. The first one was about two hours and a half to the Port of Sagunto and the second one was more than two hours to the Port of Valencia. On June 2 there was another daytime maritime reconnaissance flight with Lieutenant Vecchi. The mission was in the area of Dragonera, Valencia, and Castellon de la Plana. It was a long flight of four hours at a high altitude of 4,000 meters. On June 5 we flew with Second Lieutenant Volonterio to Salinas and Son San Juan. And on June 6 we flew another daytime visual reconnaissance flight off the shores of Barcelona with Second Lieutenant Salandin. It was only a two hour and twenty minute flight at a very high altitude of 4,200 meters.

On June 8, 1938 we flew our twenty-fifth bombardment mission. The target was the Port of San Feliu. We had twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each aboard. The pilot was Captain de Cecco. We were flying at an altitude of 2,500 meters. But because of adverse atmospheric conditions we had to return to the base and land with all cargo of bombs on board. We were lucky that all our pilots had an excellent training and handled the planes so smoothly that we trusted them without any reservations.

Our next mission was on June 16, 1938. It was our twenty-sixth bombardment. The target was again the Port of Valencia. We again had twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each aboard. The pilot was Captain de Cecco. Takeoff was at 00:15. On the island the weather was good with a light haze over the sea. We were flying at an altitude of 2,500 meters. There was good visibility. At 01:30 we reached our target and dropped the bombs. There were five search-lights and very few shots from antiaircraft guns. We made very good direct hits all along the port. There was a big fire in the port caused in the afternoon by the S.79ts from daytime bombardment patrol. We landed after 02:53.

The next day, on June 17, 1938 was our twenty-seventh bombardment. The pilot was again Captain de Cecco. This time there were several changes—we had a completely new target, the Port of Cartagena; our patrol had four planes, and we had four bombs of 250 kilograms each aboard. Before us another patrol of four planes departed for the same target. Cartagena had a reputation for having the best antiaircraft artillery and we were apprehensive about our flight there. We had a takeoff at 00:50. Weather was good. Visibility was optimal. I wrote in the "Book of Station": "It will be a little bit hard to pass the time tonight. We have more than four hours to fly to the target and back. At 02:00 we are at an altitude of 5,000 meters. It is very cold and I have a strong desire to sleep. I am skimming through a magazine to keep myself from falling asleep. We lowered our altitude to 3,800 meters and at 02:50 attacked the port from the

rear. There are ten very potent searchlights that sometimes get a glimpse of us. There are numerous shots from their anti-aircraft guns. It is very strange; out of the four bombs of 250 kilograms each only one exploded near the dock. From the others three bombs there were no results. So, we also made an acquaintance with Cartagena." We landed at our base after 04:50.

On June 19, 1938 we made the twenty-eighth bombardment. This time our target was Sabadel and specifically one machine shop for assembly and repairs of the airplanes located there. We had aboard twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. Aboard were Major Buonamico and an Engineer of Repairs from our squadron. Takeoff was at 01:00. The weather was good. We were flying at an altitude of 3,200 meters. At 03:00 we reached the target and dropped the bombs in two passes. This tactic usually gave better results than one pass only. This was possible to do because there was very little anti-aircraft reaction from the ground. We landed at our base on the island after 04:25.

On June 20, 1938 we had our twenty-ninth bombardment. In the "Book of Station" I wrote: "Tonight there is news that we are flying isolated with twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. The other planes had loaded four bombs of 250 kilograms each. The target is the Airport of Manises near Valencia. Our pilot tonight is Captain de Cecco. Takeoff is at 01:15. The weather is good – one-fourth coverage with high cumulus. At 02:25 we are navigating at an altitude of 2,800 meters between two layers of clouds. The target is almost invisible. They are searching for us from Valencia with searchlights. We are making the second passage over the target to drop the bombs and then proceed to fly back to the base. We landed after 04:14."

For some reason, I signed this entry not as usual only with my initials but with full legionnaire's name, Giulio Villani. Maybe it was in anticipation of my departure back to Italy and I wanted to leave my name in the "Book of Station" for those who would be keeping the records after I was gone.

On June 21, 1938 was our thirtieth bombardment. Our target was the Port of Valencia. Pilot was Major Buonamico. This time we had on board an unusual cargo of ten bomb mines. The takeoff was at 02:25. We were flying at an altitude of 2,800 meters. At 03:40 we reached the target and dropped the bombs. Although there was a heavy haze, our aim was very good. On the ground I counted seven searchlights, but there was very little anti-aircraft reaction. We landed at the base after 05:00. This entry I signed with my full real name, Giulio Verro, which I wanted to remain recorded, because nobody knew me by my alias name.

On June 22, 1938 was our thirty-first bombardment. The target was the Port of Barcelona. We had on board the usual twenty bombs of 50 kilograms each. Again the pilot was Major Buonamico. The takeoff was at 02:00. There was vanishing moonlight and one could see very little. We were flying at an altitude of 3,100 meters. Below everything was covered up with clouds. We found the city only after they had switched on their searchlights. To drop the bombs we had to make two passes over the target, one, at 03:15, and the other at 03:45 and then headed toward the island. We landed on our base at 04:50.

June 22, 1938 was my last entry in the "Book of Station" of Airplane Number 4 of the 251st Squadron Of Nocturnal Bombardment of the Legionary Air Force stationed on the Military Airport of San Bonnet on the Island of Mallorca during the Spanish Civil War. I signed this entry for the last time with my real name, Giulio Verro.

My total record of combat time in flight was 8,555 minutes or 142 hours and 35 minutes, verified and signed by the commandant of our squadron, Captain Pilot G. De Cecco.

Before my departure to Italy Captain De Cecco gave all members of his squadron a souvenir of their participation in the Spanish Civil War. It was a copy of the first page of a major Italian newspaper, "*Il Giornale d'Italia*."<sup>22</sup> It was mailed to him by the general from Rome with the congratulatory inscription: "To Captain De Cecco,<sup>2</sup> who at the command of a Patrol of S.81's made a hit of a fuel depository in Barcelona during the night of June 7, 1938, I make my sincere congratulations. Rome, 6/10/38. General Veldeoti."<sup>23</sup> The title and the subtitle of the article were: "65 Thousand Tons of Gasoline Are Burning From Tuesday in the Port of Barcelona. The bombardment of the war objectives was executed with fulminate precision by the Legionary Air Force."

On my copy Captain De Cecco made a personal dedication as he made to all members of our squadron who participated in such missions, although neither several others nor I were flying with him on that particular night. It was dated July 9, 1938.

When the two new radiotelegraphers and several other volunteer airmen arrived as replacements for us and for the others who were returning to Italy, we all got back our fictitious passports. Dressed again in our civilian clothes, in which we had arrived, we embarked on the mercantile and passenger ship "*Firenze*"<sup>24</sup> to return to Italy to the Port of Genoa.<sup>25</sup>

Before departure I told my friend Pierin that after all these years in the Air Force I had found that a military career was too senseless for me and that I had decided that upon my arrival in Italy I would request to be discharged from the military service. He agreed to do the same because he decided that if his *madrina* accepted his proposal he would get married soon.

Therefore, when we arrived back in our homeland we went to Rome to the headquarters of the Italian air ministry, where we were supposed to check in upon our return from Spain. At the same time we both requested a discharge from military service, which was granted to us, and we returned to our civilian status.

The last day together we visited the capital of our country, said good-bye to our military career, and promised to keep in touch by writing to each other. As a souvenir of that memorable event and wearing civilian clothes, Pierin and I made one more photo<sup>26</sup> in Rome sitting together on a wall of a monument with the background of the statue of the famous King Vittorio Emanuele II, founder of the reunified Kingdom of Italy.

Dated September 9, 1938 the Italian Air Force Ministry awarded me with *La Croce al Merito di Guerra* - Cross for War Merits in the Campaign of Spain, with *La Medaglia Commemorativa per la Campagna di Spagna* - The Commemorative Medal for the Campaign of Spain, and with *La Medaglia di Benemerenzza* - The Medal of Merit for Volunteers in the Campaign of Spain.

Then in a Decree dated May 2, 1940 I was awarded by the Italian Air Force Ministry *La Croce di Guerra al Valor Militare* - The Cross of War for Military Valor for the active voluntary mission of war in the Skies of Spain, November 1937 - March 1938.

Although my youthful enthusiasm to be able to fly and to see new places and adventure in foreign lands was rewarded, I learned that a military career was not for me. I was glad to return home to my family and to resume civilian life.

1. Spanish Fascist dictator.
2. Territory in northwestern Africa.
3. Chancellor of Germany and leader of Nazi Party.
4. "The Green Mices" - from an Italian expression *Far vedere I sorci verdi* - To show the green mice, which means "To amaze or to astonish somebody with their actions."
5. Select Airman, the second rank in Italian Air Force.
6. *Quaderno di Stazione, Servizio Radiotelegrafico d'Aeronautica, Stazione AKC, Aeroplano No. 4, della 192 Squadriglia di Bombardamento Terrestre di Aeronautica Italiana (Forli, Febbraio 24, 1937 - Novembre 20, 1937)* [in Italian] [*Book of Station, Radiotelegraphic Service, Station AKC, Airplane No.4, 192nd Squadron of Terrestrial Bombardment Formation of Italian Air Force (Forli, February 24, 1937 - November 20, 1937)*] *e della 251 Squadriglia di Bombardamento Notturmo di Aeronautica Legionaria (Palma de Mallorca, Novembre 21, 1937 - Giugno 22, 1938)* [in Italian] [and of the 251st Squadron of Terrestrial Nocturnal Bombardment of the Legionary Air Force (Palma de Mallorca, November 21, 1937 - June 22, 1938)]. Recorded by the Select Airman Radio-Telegrapher Giulio Verro [Giulio Villani, legionnaire's alias] (Seal, 251. *Squadriglia, B.N.*) [Seal, 251 Squadron, B.N.] Selected pages.
7. *Aviazione Legionaria, Stralci Voli di Pace, 251 Squadriglia B.N. Secondo Semestre 1937 - Primo Semestre 1938* [in Italian] [Legionaire Airforce, Excerpts of Peacetime Flights, 251 Squadron B.N, Second semester, 1937 - First Semester 1938]. . From a document issued to AV. SC. R.T. Verro Giulio [Aviere Scelto, Radio-Telegrapher Verro Giulio].
8. *Aviazione Legionaria, Stralci Voli di Guerra, 251 Squadriglia B.N. Secondo Semestre 1937 - Primo Semestre 1938* [in Italian] [Legionaire Airforce, Excerpts of Wartime Flights, Second Semester, 1937 - First Semester 1938]. From a document issued to AV. SC. R.T. Verro Giulio [Aviere Scelto, Radio-Telegrapher Verro Giulio].
9. "All for the Fatherland" [in Spanish].
10. Italian island in the Tyrrhenian Sea.
11. A group of Spanish islands in the Mediterranean Sea.
12. Major island of the Balearic Islands.
13. *Bombardamento Notturmo* [in Italian] - Night bombardment.
14. Head Radio-Telegrapher.
15. From the copy of the *Garnet Militar de Identidad* [in Spanish] - Military Identity Card.
16. Bats.
17. From the photographs dated: 7/9/37 and 7/12/37 [as of North American convention: month, day, and year. Note that on the photo the dates are stated according to the European convention: day, month, and year].
18. The time throughout this chapter is kept as recorded in the "*Quaderno di Stazione*" as of the European convention - time begins at 00:01, or one minute past midnight and it ends at 24:00 the following midnight.
19. Cuenca - in English.
20. Leaflets printed in Spanish, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
21. From the photographs made after the bombardment.
22. *Il Giornale d'Italia*, No. 137 [in Italian] (Rome, Friday, June 10, 1938).
23. Name of the general not completely legible.
24. From the photographs aboard the ship "*Firenze*" - Florence.
25. Italian port in the Tyrrhenian Sea.
26. From the photograph in Rome.

## Italy Allies With Germany

As Remembered by Giulio Verro  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

When I returned from Spain in the summer of 1938 I went to see Signor Bargero<sup>1</sup>

and asked him if he knew someplace where I could apply for a job. He found me a place to work in a small factory, which made little motors for some military equipment. After I worked there a few months, Signor Bargerò came to see me with the news that STIPEL<sup>2</sup> was searching for telephone servicemen and, if I was interested in working there, he would recommend me to Engineer Sartorio, whom he knew well. Of course I was more than interested, this was exactly the job that my father always suggested to me, public service; more than that, STIPEL was considered a prestigious company with many fringe benefits, good pay, and opportunity for advancement through training on the job and company-sponsored technical training. I was very grateful to my teacher and friend Signor Bargerò, who had the confidence in me to give me a good recommendation.

My previous employer was very upset that I was leaving after he had trained me for the job. He said that he had the right to keep me from leaving under a special government provision for industries that were supplying parts for military hardware. But he said that he wouldn't do that out of respect for Signor Bargerò.

I was hired at the STIPEL as an apprentice to work with the team of telephone installers. I was instructed to come to the workshop at the STIPEL building and from there to travel with the telephone installers crew on the streetcar or bus to wherever the work assignment was for that day. My perception was that I would be helping and learning to install the telephones, which I considered to be a nice and clean job. I was so eager to make a good impression that the first day I came to work all dressed up in a suit, good shirt, and a tie. The other workers at the workshop who were dressed in work-clothes just looked at me smiling and made a few jokes. However, before the crew went to take the streetcar to go to our place of work, I received the overalls, STIPEL uniform hat, and a black leather bag with the tools from the company stockroom.

When we arrived at the Hospital Mulinette, one of the largest hospitals in Turin, and I saw the type of work we had to do there, I understood why my coworkers had made fun of my elegant appearance. The crew was adding the new internal telephone lines and was installing lead cables from the switchboard to the various hospital wards and offices. From the first day I began on-the-job training by helping an experienced telephone line installer by the name Pavia to install those heavy lead cables.

The workday at the STIPEL started at eight o'clock in the morning. At noon we had two full hours break, which was sufficient time to take the streetcar home, eat lunch, rest a little, and return to work by two o'clock in the afternoon. Then we had to work four more hours until six in the evening. At that time this schedule was very common in most offices and public service enterprises, which did not work in shifts. We worked at the hospital for about three weeks. During that time we had a chance to socialize with hospital employees, especially with the young women. There I met one young switchboard operator, Elsa, who was about my age. She had red hair with a copper tint that I liked right away. She also had good manners and a somewhat shy personality. Her father was the head of the hospital maintenance.

Before our crew completed the installation work at the Mulinette Hospital, I showed Elsa a lot of attention and invited her to go on Sunday to the movies, which she accepted. That Sunday afternoon I was surprised that Elsa came to the movies not alone, but also brought her younger sister Rita, who was just a teenager. During that summer I met Elsa's parents, who were very religious and strict with their two daughters. From that time on, when we were going out to the movies or just for a walk, we always

had Elsa's younger sister with us as a kind of chaperone. I was also visiting Elsa at home on Sundays, again under the vigilant eyes of her strict parents. It seems that they did approve of my courting their daughter; however, they made sure not to allow us to be alone. Occasionally I was able to find a few moments to give her a furtive kiss.

Although my youthful passion was restricted to hands-off behavior, I valued their protective attitude toward their daughter. But I was not sure if Elsa was shy and not able to express her feelings toward me, or that she was obediently maintaining the standard behavior established by her parents. They were extremely religious, attended Mass every Sunday, and strictly followed all the rules established by the Catholic Church.

When we finished the plant in the hospital, we were sent to work out of town in the nearby hamlet of Pinerolo and we had to take a bus every morning to get there. We were installing the telephone lines in a small factory which was located in an old building, and for some reason we had to place the lead cables very high on the wall. To help Pavia install the heavy lead cables, we had to climb on tall and shaky ladders and hold the cable rolls while Pavia wired them on the wall.

After I learned the tricks of the trade, I was given assignments to make small installations on my own, mostly in offices and factories where they needed to add one or two telephone lines. I liked working in different places and to meeting many interesting people. There was no pressure on the job since the company had a policy of always making the customer happy, and that meant we had to take all the time necessary to do the job well.

As before my departure for military service, I was bringing my salary home and giving it to my mother, leaving myself only enough for my personal expenses and recreation. She took care of buying me all the shirts, underwear, socks, hankies, and whatever else I needed. What she was able to save was left for the needs of the family, unexpected expenses or any emergencies.

When I was in Spain, I was sending home the usual part of my military pay as I did before in Italy. But as volunteers our pay had increased and I saved some money from the portion of my military pay that I kept for myself. When I returned home, I allowed myself the luxury of buying a very good camera. I also needed new outfits, since I had outgrown all of my old clothes. With my savings and with the money that my mother saved from what I was sending home, I was finally able to afford a good new winter coat and a new suit. And my old, but not worn out, clothes were passed on to my younger brother Domenico, who had grown so fast during the time I was away that they fit him just right.

My mother accompanied me to the tailor who, as she heard, was a good master. We selected the fabric and she made sure that whatever I liked was good and strong wool that would last for many years. She also bargained hard with the tailor for the cost of labor. She also accompanied me to buy new shirts and shoes because she had to be sure that I was buying good quality merchandise at an affordable price.

In May 1939 Mussolini and Hitler signed a military assistance pact. Shortly after that Germany seized Bohemia and Moravia and the Italian Armed Forces invaded and annexed the small neighboring state of Albania. Then in September of that year Germany invaded Poland and this event sparked the beginning of World War II. Mussolini was watching Hitler annexing the neighboring states, and, although Italy had not yet officially entered the war, with his speeches *Il Duce* was preparing the Italians

that it could happen at any moment. In anticipation of war, a draft started for some selected branches of the Armed Forces.

I was drafted in the fall of 1939. For several months I was stationed in Turin at the Cavour Military Barracks waiting to be assigned to the new unit of the Air Force. There was no military training or exercises for us there; it was just plain waiting and waiting. Once we were accounted for in the morning we could leave the barracks and return to be accounted for in the evening. Being stationed in my hometown, I was spending more time in my house than in the barracks. We were also allowed to have leaves on Sundays and I visited Elsa and we went to the movies or for walks in Valentino Park along the River Po.

Finally, in the first months of 1940 I was transferred to Rome, where the Air Force assembled their draftees. In Rome we were stationed in military barracks near the Roman ruins of Torraccia. Again, there were many long months of waiting while Mussolini was deciding on the right moment to enter the war.

On June 10, 1940 Mussolini announced that Italy was entering the war.

Then, in the fall of 1940 the Air Force assigned me to a small flight assistance unit for the Italian Air Force. The unit was self-sufficient in its operations and for this purpose had four trucks especially equipped for the specific tasks we were to perform. One truck had a power generator working on gasoline and it supplied electricity for operating all other equipment. The second truck had emergency, repair, and spare parts, tools, and equipment for the whole unit and it towed a small trailer with radiotelegraphic equipment and a radio-goniometer.<sup>3</sup> The third truck was equipped as a field kitchen. And the fourth truck was equipped inside as a trailer with camp beds to sleep on and to transport us, the servicemen.

We were ordered to drive our trucks to the railroad station where all the trucks were loaded on the railroad platform cars. All servicemen that were needed to operate this unit traveled in passenger cars. We traveled north across Europe to Belgium, where we were assigned to the CAI,<sup>4</sup> Corps of Italian Air Force, stationed near Brussels.

In September 1940 we arrived at our destination in a small town called Espinettes, located about halfway between Brussels and Waterloo. There we set up our Flight Assistance Center. Our assignment was to assist in flight the Italian bombers BR-22,<sup>5</sup> that arrived in Belgium in October 1940. The intention of Mussolini was to participate with the German *Luftwaffe* in bombardments of London across the English Channel.

We were stationed in a school and our office with the equipment was in a nearby villa of a rich Jew had who managed to escape. We were receiving meteorological bulletins and passing the information to our Italian Air Force Unit and to the Italian airplanes flying in the area. In my free time from service duties I admired the beautiful small villas and clean streets of Espinettes on my walks and managed to explore historic Waterloo, and the city of Brussels. I even ventured to see the English Channel, which was not difficult to do via good public transportation on streetcars, on which we military men could ride free.

By the time the Italian Air Force Squadron was ready to operate, the cold winter weather began to interfere with flying the missions. The BR-22 bombers were not built to withstand the climate with freezing temperatures that formed ice on the aircraft and they either could not take off or were falling down. After several months of trying, the

whole Italian Air Force operation was cancelled and in the first months of winter 1941 we were ordered back home.

We again loaded our trucks with all the equipment and drove them to the railroad station, where they were put this time on a troop-train of Germans traveling south. Again we crossed Europe, this time all the way back to Rome. Our officers, who were more sophisticated than us simple draftees, used this opportunity to smuggle lots of famous Belgian hunting guns and prestigious furs.

Back in Rome we were housed again in the same barracks and had to wait again to see where our command would send us next. In Rome I had a big surprise to find my old friend Pierin Panzeri, who was assigned to our unit. It was a joyous reunion for both of us and while we were waiting the new orders, we had plenty of time to remember our adventures in Spain. Pierin had gotten married to his military *madrina* (military pen pal) and seemed to be very happy.

While our unit was still in Belgium, toward the end of October 1940, Italy began to occupy Greece. Our troops encountered bad weather and many impassable roads at that time of the year and they had great opposition from the Greek Army. In the winter of 1941 our troops had been pushed back to the border of Albania. Mussolini had to ask Germans to come to the rescue and in a few weeks they occupied Greece. Italian troops and planes were deployed there as auxiliary units to help the Germans in the occupation of Greece and to free many of their men to fight elsewhere.

In the beginning of summer 1941 our Unit of Flight Assistance was again ordered to load our trucks on railroad freight cars. We were given provisions of bread and canned food for three days and were dispatched to Bari.<sup>6</sup> For some unknown reason our cars were detached from the train in the freight yard of Milanazzo. We were left there for more than one week. When our food supplies were finished we started to spend our own money to buy something to eat, but after ten days most of us had spent all the money we had.

We decided to go to the infantry unit stationed in the village of Milanazzo and to ask them if they could feed us. We told the officer in charge that for ten days we were abandoned in the freight yard. He ordered that we be given what was left of their soup after they had fed their soldiers. In addition, he contacted the military authorities and we finally were attached to another train going to Bari. There we were placed again in military barracks to wait for our next destination. Finally, our Unit of Flight Assistance was ordered to be loaded on a ship going to Albania, which at that time was already occupied by the Italian Army.

On July 11, 1941 we were disembarked at the Port of Valona, town of Durazzo,<sup>1</sup> and from there we drew our trucks to Tirana, the capital city of Albania. There, our unit with all the trucks was placed in a big courtyard and we had to wait again for orders to proceed for Athens, the capital of Greece.

In Tirana there were many other Italian military units and as we waited we had time to walk in the city. One serviceman from our unit who was in charge of the electrical generator truck found out from other servicemen that in Greece there was a bad shortage of food and that those who could buy some non-perishable staples in Albania and smuggle them to Greece could make very good money. He said that he himself didn't have the money and asked if somebody would like to make a fifty-fifty deal with him and finance one hundred liras for the purchase of one bag of beans. He

would take care of finding the beans, hiding the contraband food in his truck, and selling it in Greece.

I told him that I liked the idea, but I didn't have the money either. It just happened that, shortly after, I encountered a young man whom I knew well from my school years. He used to live in Turin on Corso Novara Street a couple of houses from where I lived. I asked him if he had one hundred liras that he could loan to me and I would ask my mother to return that amount to his parents in Turin. He agreed and gave me the money. All excited I returned to my unit and entrusted the money to our electrician, who immediately bought a bag of beans and hid it in his truck. "You will see," he told me, "we will make good money." I wrote right away to my mother to take one hundred liras to my friend's parents.

This time the orders came sooner than in any other place we had waited. We received supplies of crackers and cans of meat for the journey and enough gasoline for our trucks to drive all the way to Athens. It took us about a week or ten days to reach our destination. On our way we added to our diet by exchanging some gasoline with the Albanian peasants for eggs. But as soon as we crossed the border, the Greek population didn't have enough food for themselves. I remember in one of the villages that we traveled through I saw a small skinny boy sitting on the side of the road eating grass. I thought, *This is hunger*.

When we arrived in Athens our Air Force Headquarters directed us to establish our Flight Assistance Center in the village of Cocovanes, about thirty kilometers from the city of Athens on the road to the Airport of Tatoi. All servicemen were accommodated in the village school building, while six of our officers and the German interpreter, who was also a liaison person with the German headquarters, lived in the city of Athens.

As soon as the electrician-entrepreneur could get into the city of Athens with the bag of our contraband beans he sold them to some restaurant owner. However, he came to me with a very disappointed face and said that the business did not go well. He said that when the buyer opened the bag all the beans were full of sprouts and therefore he had to sell them at half of the cost price. I certainly didn't believe his story but there was no way to check it. So, he gave me half of what he said he sold them for, reminding me of our fifty-fifty agreement. I finished with a big loss and two important lessons. One lesson that I learned was: "Business is a very risky business." And the other lesson was: "You have to know the person with whom you are doing business well."

A few weeks after we had settled in, more servicemen arrived making a total of about thirty men to serve in our center. Among the newly arrived was a young man from Florence, Bruno Zanobini, who almost immediately became mine and Pierin's friend. His parents were small merchants and only recently had lost their delicatessen store due to bankruptcy. But Bruno and his older sister had grown up when the family was moderately prosperous and Bruno had graduated from middle school; in the future this was very important in opening doors for him to many occupations and further education. He was about two years younger than I and was well read, which distinguished him from Pierin Panzeri. He had a mild and accommodating character, good manners, and was well balanced in dealing with people and situations. I liked his Florentine accent as it reminded me of my childhood when I lived in Tuscany in the little village of Asciano near Pisa.

Bruno was also a radiotelegrapher and we were working in three shifts giving change to each other in the center. This bound the three of us even more closely together as we shared many tasks and responsibilities in our work. There was only one warrant officer who knew radiotelegraphy; he was involved with paperwork in the office, but was available in emergencies to substitute for one of us.

One of the functions of our Flight Assistance Center was to assist the Italian Air Force airplanes that were flying in the Mediterranean Sea to the Airport on the Island of Lero, the Greek Island that was given to Italy after World War I. We would track their positions with the radio-goniometer and transmit the data to them by the radiotelegraph. Another function of our center was to receive meteorological bulletins and to submit them in writing to the Italian Air Force Headquarters in Athens, as well as to the pilots, when requested.

The center had its own field kitchen and each serviceman took charge of it for one month on a rotation basis; however, the cooking was done by a Greek cook who also cooked separate meals for the officers. In the school building where all servicemen lived were located our center's offices and two separate mess halls, one for the servicemen and another for the officers.

One warrant officer was in charge of food provisions, which were stored on the premises in a storage room. In our first year there the staples and other nonperishable provisions such as pasta, beans, canned meat, marmalade, and wine were brought to Greece from Italy for all Italian troops stationed there.<sup>7</sup> During that period we had a sufficient quantity of food in the storage room. Some fresh vegetables and occasionally meats came from local sources. During the second year delivery of provisions from Italy became irregular and, although most of the time our diet was adequate, shortages in some foods lowered the quantity and quality of our meals, resulting in discontent toward our warrant officer.

I remember one episode that happened to me during one such food shortage. That day we had a watery soup for lunch and I was so disgusted with it that I took the soup and went to complain to the warrant officer, who was eating at the officer's dining room.

"What kind of soup is this?" I asked him, placing the soup in front of him on the table. "It's only water with a few lonely pieces of pasta swimming in it."

The warrant officer pushed away the plate, showing his annoyance at being disturbed during his lunchtime, and answered sternly, "Don't you know that there is a war going on? We have to cook with what supplies we can get!"

I was not too happy with his answer and defiantly told him, "I feel sick. I cannot start my duty after lunch." This meant that another warrant officer had to substitute for me and no one was happy to do it under the hot afternoon sun.

"If you are sick, go right away to the Airport Infirmary to see the doctor!" ordered the warrant officer and added, "I will call him that you are coming."

I grabbed my plate and defiantly poured the soup in the garbage pail and walked out of the dining room. Then I went to the road leading to the airport, where I got a ride on one of the German trucks.

Knowing that the doctor had received a call from my superiors, I saluted him and presenting myself boldly, "Doctor, the slacker<sup>8</sup> has arrived!"

The young doctor calmly ordered to me, "Here, sit down. Let me take your

temperature.”

“What for?” I asked him. “Didn’t they call you from the center?”

“Never mind about that. I need to take your temperature anyway.”

I obeyed him and sat quietly thinking that as a punishment I would lose my Sunday leave. The doctor took the thermometer from me and said, “Hmm... Thirty-seven -and-a-half degrees.<sup>9</sup> Two days of rest and you will be good as new. And keep out of the sun.”

I couldn’t believe my ears.

Then the doctor commented that I had a Piedmont<sup>10</sup> accent.

“Yes,” I told him, “I am from the city of Turin.”<sup>11</sup>

After hearing this, he began to talk to me in Piedmontese<sup>12</sup> and told me that he was also from Turin, that he was drafted into the military service as soon as he completed his medical studies. We chatted for a while about our city, the war, and military life. Meanwhile he wrote a note ordering two days of rest for me. I was most grateful to him for saving me from punishment.

The dry and hot weather of Greece and the location of our center on the outskirts of the village allowed the servicemen to dress casually in shorts and with or without athletic shirts. Although our equipment was under tents placed in the field, we spent a lot of time in the open under the sun and we all had a nice dark tan. However, the Greek villagers were not happy and complained to our officers that their young women were exposed every day to the indecency of seeing half-naked young men.

When we were not on duty, there was not much for us to do in the village. To have a good time we had to travel to Athens, where many German and Italian troops were stationed. To get there was easy; we just had to ask for a ride on any of the many German trucks driving on the road from the airport to the capital. In Athens there were many places of entertainment catering to the German and Italian military. There were movie theaters and *cafés* where servicemen could find Greek wine spiced with retsina, and have drinking bouts and a company of women.

During the day, those of us who could appreciate the history could visit the Parthenon<sup>13</sup> and other archeological sites, where I made lots of pictures with my camera.<sup>14</sup> We also visited museums, which were open to visitors. I usually went to these places with my new friend Bruno Zanobini, who shared my curiosity about historical places. We went on those days when it was Pierin’s shift at the radio-telegraph station because he didn’t care much about history or antiquities.

Many times our young German interpreter Toni joined us because he appreciated our knowledge of ancient Greek history, which we had learned in our Italian schools, and he was eager to learn from us what he hadn’t learned in his German school. He liked to be in our company and he befriended the three of us so much that, before he went home to Germany on a military leave, he brought us a present, a large portrait of *Fuhrer*, as the Nazi’s called Hitler. Although we were not impressed with his gift, we decided not to offend our friend and attached the portrait above our lockers. Then one day it disappeared without anybody noticing it.

In the summer of 1942 I went on a military leave home. In my correspondence with Elsa we decided that during the leave we would have our engagement and would set the date for our wedding for the next time I came home on leave.

During my departure on leave from the Athens Airport, I encountered the First

Pilot Lieutenant Terracciano, whom I hadn't seen since our legionary campaign in Spain. I told him that I was going home to have my engagement and to set the wedding date with my fiancée. He shook his head and tried to discourage me from taking that step at that time. He explained that being in the military service and especially during the war—no one knew when it would end—would keep us apart for too long time, and many things could happen during that time. I knew that previously he had problems with his wife and attributed his opinion to his personal experience. I sympathized with him and respectfully listened to his advice, but my youthful enthusiasm didn't allow me to give much importance to his wise words.

During my short leave at home we had our engagement and our families finally got acquainted. We set our wedding date and to please her parents we agreed to have it the next year on the religious holiday of Virgin Mary in the month of August 1943. My uncle Pietro volunteered to take responsibility to prepare all the necessary documents required for marriage. He also gave us an engagement gift, a print reproduction of "Madonna with Child" by Murillo, and I entrusted it for safekeeping to Elsa.

All preparations for the engagement took so much of our time that we had very little time to be together alone. But at least this time I was able to be alone with her without her sister chaperoning; however, Elsa made me behave properly, allowing me only a few kisses and embraces. I was hoping that after being married she would be free to express her feelings with more spontaneity.

The leave passed very quickly and, in addition, to be on time at my center I had to depart a few days early because ahead of me was a long journey on the train back to Greece.

When I returned to the center, I told my friends Pierin and Bruno that it was wise of me to have bought the engagement ring on my previous leave, because now it was impossible to buy golden wedding rings in Italy. By the order of *Il Duce*, the sale of gold jewelry was prohibited, because all gold had to be used to pay for the war expenses. My friend Pierin was going on military leave soon after my arrival. Before departure he promised me that maybe he could find one ring for me from his aunt. Indeed, when he returned to Greece, he brought the golden wedding ring and told me that it was his present for my future wedding. I was very impressed with my friend's generosity. I immediately secured the ring with a security pin inside of a breast pocket of my uniform jacket and only my friend Pierin knew that it was hidden there.

In the early summer of 1943 I applied for a marriage leave and was waiting for the papers to arrive. However, the invasion of southern Italy by the Allies in July changed the political and military situation. All military leaves were cancelled until further instructions from the Italian military headquarters. I notified my parents that my leave was cancelled and I wrote to Elsa that I regretted that we had to postpone our wedding because all the leaves were cancelled for an indefinite period of time. The radio from Italy was downplaying the seriousness of the events. However, our Air Force headquarters in Athens was functioning as usual. We also continued our service duties in the established routine.

Then other unexpected events took place between Elsa's family and mine. First, I received a very long letter from my mother, in which she wrote that the two families had exchanged harsh words on account of the original of my birth certificate, which was required for marriage purposes. The very religious parents of Elsa could not accept that

I was an adopted son and that I was born to an unwed mother. They accused the family of hiding this fact, which should have been presented to them before the engagement last year. Although my uncle Pietro tried hard to moderate the tempers, he thought that time was needed to smooth the ruffled feathers on both sides.

A very short and detached letter from Elsa followed my mother's letter. She wrote that maybe it was for the best that my leave was cancelled, because unexpected and very serious complications had arisen when her parents saw my original birth certificate document, which was required by the Catholic Church for a church wedding. Her parents were very upset that this was not disclosed before the engagement and that now they were absolutely against this marriage. She finished her short letter by saying, "Only if it's God's will, will we get married."

Elsa's letter upset me immensely. If she loved me, how could she resign herself to a decision by her parents? Not even one word that she didn't agree with their decision; not even one word of consolation for me, just a reference to God. I couldn't share these details with my friends. I could not reveal such intimate facts about my mother; it was important for me to protect her reputation. I only told them that there were some quarrels between the two families without going into details and that my marriage was put on hold for now.

On that weekend Pierin and I went to Athens to the usual bar that we patronized. And for the first time in my life I got so drunk that I lost some of my inhibitions. I remember well that I climbed on the table and began to recite poetry, gesticulating like an actor on the stage. Pierin, as usual when he was drinking too much, began to cry and tell me that he was born unlucky, and complained that his parents didn't love him. Well, after all I was not so drunk, because seeing my friend in that deplorable condition; I stopped my theatrical performance and took care of my friend by bringing him back to our dormitory.

In Italy, the military situation and the political events that followed were developing and changing very quickly. We were able to hear the news from Italy on the radio and we could anticipate dramatic changes in our country in the near future. So far, the Italian military headquarters in Athens was functioning as usual, and our center was working without any changes in our mission. However, we could anticipate that the events in Italy would also be felt here soon. We had no other choice but to wait for orders from our high military command, because our situation was out of our control; in fact, it seemed to be completely out of the control of our Italian government.

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1. See the chapter "Giulio Is Growing Up."
  2. STIPEL – acronym for *Societa Telefonica Interregionale Piemonte e Lombardia* - Interregional Telephone Company of Piedmont and Lombardy.
  3. Radio direction finder.
  4. *Corpo Aereo Italiano*.
  5. *Bombardiere Rosatelli-22* - Bomber Rosatelli-22.
  6. Italian town and port on the Thyrrenian Sea.
  7. In the Italian Armed Forces one glass of wine at lunch was given to each serviceman as a part of his daily food ration at that time.
  8. Military slang for a person who evades his duty.
  9. On the Celcium scale 36.6 degrees is considered to be a normal temperature for human body.
  10. Piedmont region in northwestern Italy.
  11. Capital city of the Piedmont region.

12. Dialect spoken in the Piedmont region.
13. The Doric Temple of Athena built in the 5th century B.C. on the Acropolis in Athens.
14. The numerous photos made Giulio in Greece.

## Italian Armistice

**As Remembered by Giulio Verro**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

On July 10, 1943 the Allied Forces landed on the Island of Sicily. On July 25, 1943 it was announced on Italian radio that King *Vittorio Emanuele III* asked for and accepted the resignation of Benito Mussolini from his duties as chief of government, prime minister, and secretary of state and appointed in his place Marshal of Italy Pietro Badoglio, and that the king himself was assuming the command of Armed Forces. Having lost Mussolini as their ally, the Germans poured their troops into Italy to control the military situation.

After the Allies occupied a part of southern Italy, the king and Badoglio's government established themselves in the southern part of Italy at Salerno.<sup>1</sup> On September 8, 1943 we heard on Italian radio that the king had signed an armistice between the Italian Kingdom and the Allies, ceasing all warfare between the two sides. And on October 13, 1943 Prime Minister Badoglio announced that the king had declared war on Germany.

Meanwhile, in October 1943 Mussolini, with the help of the Germans, formed a government in northern Italy that he named the Italian Social Republic, also known as the Republic of Salò, taking its name from the small village on the western shore of Lake Garda where it was located. Political and civil chaos erupted in the country now divided into two parts.

Our Flight Assistance unit stationed in Greece was equipped with radio receivers and we could follow most of what was announced by the two Italian governments. But our military command headquarters in Athens was not issuing any explanations or orders to us about the situation, or which of these two governments was in charge of our military units in Greece. We continued our duties as we had before.

For about a week after the armistice there were no changes in our situation at the Flight Assistance center. Then one morning our German interpreter came without our Italian officers, with whom he had usually come before; instead he came with a German officer who announced that since Italy was no longer Ally with the Germany they would send us back to Italy.

After that announcement, we didn't see our Italian officers anymore. German officer ordered us to give up all our weapons, radio, and other communication equipment, and all trucks. We didn't question the authority of the Germans to requisition it because it seemed logical that they would not allow us to take it back to Italy. The German officer also ordered us to stay in our dormitory and wait for further orders. We were all so happy, innocently believing that for us the war was over. Only a few young men who had Greek girlfriends didn't want to go back home and they disappeared soon after this announcement.

In a couple of days Germans came and collected our weapons. They told us to get ready and wait for the train that would take us home. We divided among ourselves all food provisions remaining in the storage room and packed them in our military backpacks for the journey.

On the day when we were packing our belongings, Toni, the German interpreter, came to see us to say good-bye. He was sitting on one of the bunk beds chatting with us when we moved the locker and behind it found the wrinkled and dusty portrait of Adolf Hitler that Toni had given us as a present. I don't remember if it was Bruno or I, but one of us grabbed the portrait and started to dust it and smooth it out. Then Toni, indignant at how disrespectfully we had treated his *Fuhrer*, took it from us and shaking his head mumbled German swear words at us, "*Ferfluchte Italianische Menschen*."<sup>2</sup> After this happened, Toni's good-bye lost its friendliness he had for us before.

We waited again about two days before the Germans came with the truck and took us to the railroad station in Athens. There was a long train with freight cars already filled with Italian soldiers and *Alpini*,<sup>3</sup> who saluted us as we were passing by to our freight car. Anticipating a journey home, a general joyous mood prevailed among the young Italian servicemen. We could hear an Italian folk song accompanied by a guitar coming from one of the cars.

When the train finally started its voyage north it was moving slowly at about thirty kilometers per hour. It was hot and many young men climbed on the car roofs, where the breeze made it more pleasant to travel. As we were crossing Greek territory, the train stopped often and waited sometimes for a half-hour or more at the stations. There were about thirty men in each freight car. From the time we boarded the train in Athens we were left without any food for three days. We were lucky that each of us was carrying in our military backpacks the provisions that we had divided from our storage room.

As the train continued to travel north across Yugoslavia, the weather changed. It was cold and the men no longer climbed on the car roofs and, to keep the cold air out, we all closed the car doors. It took a while for somebody to notice that the train did not change direction at some point and, instead of turning south toward Italy, it continued to travel north. But even when we became aware of this, we probably were not worrying about it, guessing that maybe it had to make a detour, which was very common during wartime.

After the train entered the territory of former Austria, a large number of German soldiers surrounded the train and locked all the doors of the freight cars so no one would attempt to escape. After this happened, our hopes of going home vanished. In Austria the train continued to travel north. After that, the only food we received each day was about one liter of watered-down soup made with turnips and no bread. The men from our unit still had some food in their backpacks, which some of us decided to ration to ourselves.

Finally, one evening when it was almost dark, the train stopped near an enormous camp encircled with barbwire. The German soldiers counted about twenty five men from each car and directed each group to the earth barracks. Actually, those were holes dug into the earth and covered with roofs.

When we got inside, a strong smell of humid earth enveloped us. It was dark and there wasn't any light at all. To orient ourselves, we lighted a few matches and saw low

wooden platforms about one foot from the ground, and everybody hurried to find himself a place to sleep. As I put my backpack on it and sat down, I told to myself, "Giulio, you will never get out of here." In the dark I fell asleep with the gloomiest scenario about my future.

In the morning we were allowed to get out of the earth barracks and I heard one young Italian singing, "*Ci sposteremo a maggio con tante rose, con tante rose...*"<sup>4</sup> and it gave me hope that not all was lost. As I looked around, I saw many men, all from the Italian Air Force, Army, and *Alpini*. The camp was in a large open field and one could not see where it ended. The low roofs rising from the ground like huge mushrooms seemed to continue without end beyond the horizon. In the front, however, one could see barbwire running and disappearing beyond the roofs of a few wooden buildings for the guards and the kitchen. Somebody found out that we were in the northern part of *Oberschlesia*<sup>1</sup> in a camp where the Germans had kept Jews before.

Probably the camp was so far from the nearest villages that the Germans allowed us to be outside all day long. During the three days that we were kept in that camp we had only one meal a day, the watered-down soup made with turnips and no bread. Soon somebody discovered that there were some wild rabbits running around; they caught them and roasted them on a fire made from dry grasses.

On the second day, several Italian officers arrived in the camp and invited us to enroll in the Army of the Italian Social Republic, which was allied with Germany. The officers were promising that this was the only chance to get out of the camp and to return to northern Italy; those who did not enroll would be prisoners of war. It was surprising that from that mass of young soldiers there were only about two-dozen who actually enrolled; the rest opted to become prisoners of war.

On the third day the Germans began to take groups of one hundred-fifty to two hundred prisoners and lead them to the guard building. Pierin Panzeri, Bruno Zanobini, and I, who were in the same barrack, were in one of the first groups taken that day. We were assigned prisoner numbers, mine was 14477, and we were again put in the freight cars. The train took us directly to the small town of Laband<sup>5</sup> in Oberschlesia.<sup>6</sup>

The first stop was in a building equipped with showers and disinfection facilities where we had to undress and turn over all our clothing and luggage to be disinfected. From there we were led to the camp, named Lager Laband.

It was a standard camp with wooden barracks surrounded by barbwire. It was built right in the middle of a populated area. The camp was divided into several sections for the English, Soviet, and Italian prisoners of war, and one section was for the foreign workers, who were mostly French. In the camp there were already many Italian prisoners of war who had arrived there before us. From them we learned about the daily camp routine and many shrewd and practical ways of dealing with everyday life in captivity.

The three of us, Pierin, Bruno, and I, were assigned to the barrack named "Susi," Room number 95. The inside of the barracks was also standard, with bunk beds covered with straw filled mattresses and pillows, a small cast-iron stove, wooden tables, and benches. There were about twenty men assigned to our room. Bruno, Pierin, and I chose bunk beds where we could stay close to each other. Pierin and I chose to stay on the lower level and Bruno took the upper level of my bed. We consoled ourselves that this was much better than the camp where we stayed up on our arrival in Germany.

That evening we received the standard watered-down soup made with turnips and our first ration of bread, which, we were told, should be enough until tomorrow evening. One rectangular loaf of a heavy dark bread of about two pounds had to be divided between two men. As we were staying in line waiting for the bread, the old-timers told us how to divide it fairly by hiding the two halves behind the back and asking your partner to select either the bread held in the right or left hand.

We also found out very quickly that the latrines were outside in a separate wooden building, as were the lavatories, showers, and laundry tubs, none of which had hot water. There were many men that told us they didn't take a full shower because of that. But some, including Bruno and me, dared to have one quick shower right away, and thereafter every week, no matter how cold it was.

The next day our German *Lagerfuhrer*, with the help of an Italian interpreter, interviewed us about our skills and occupations. Bruno and I declared ourselves to be telephone repairmen and Pierin decided to declare himself as a student, hoping to get an easier job. Right after the interview, we were ordered to form a column and under the supervision of the German guard with a gun across his shoulder were led to the place of our work, the *Presswerke Laband* factory. When we arrived there, Bruno and I were assigned right away to the telephone repair shop, and Pierin was assigned to the group to unload coal from the railroad platforms.

The head of the telephone department was a German engineer, *Herr Kamionka*, who was also a political boss of the Nazi Party in the town of Laband and in the factory. In the telephone repair shop there were four other men beside us. There were two German telephone technicians, Kochalla and Kramer, whom everybody called by their last names. They were responsible for all phases of the telephone system in the factory. Then there was a young Polish man named Rufin, who was allowed only to install telephones, while Kochalla always made the connections. And there was a Frenchman, Emile, who made repairs on telephones in the shop. All foreign workers for some reason were called only by their first names. Bruno and I were also presented and later called only by our first names. We were told that our job will be to help Emile in the shop to repair the telephones and, when needed, to help repair or to put the new telephone cables between the departments and the telephone switchboard that was located in the office building standing at the entrance gate to the factory.

Right from the start Bruno and I considered ourselves very lucky to have been placed there. All workers in the shop were friendly with us. When nobody was in the shop, Kochalla shared his lunch sandwiches with us. Emile and Rufin were more than friendly with us; they showed us a sincere camaraderie. Both Bruno and I knew enough French from our school days; beside that, the Italian language, especially my Piedmont dialect, was helpful to us in communicating with Emile, who in turn spoke well in German and would translate the orders to us and explain the work that we had to do. In fact, Bruno and I improved our French considerably just by talking with Emile many hours a day.

Emile taught us how to fake that we were "working" when *Herr Kamionka* or any boss from another department came in our shop. For this purpose Emile gave each of us an old telephone to always keep on the bench in a half-disassembled state and a screwdriver to take in our hands ready to "work," when we would hear somebody climbing the high, steep, and squeaky stairs leading to our shop. The shop was located

on a platform built on one end inside a tall building under the high roof of a large machine tool shop called *Werkstatt* in German.

Herr Kamionka liked his workers to look neat and clean and he appreciated that Bruno and I were always well shaved, had neatly combed hair, and wore clean white shirts under our Air Force uniforms. When the factory received shoes for the workers, he gave us the first two pairs, because ours were worn out from walking on the road to and from the factory, which was more than a mile-and-a-half from our camp.

The old German soldier who accompanied the column of Italian prisoners of war from the camp to the factory also liked us. Actually, he liked the four of us, Bruno and me, Benito and his friend Nemo. We were always ready at five-thirty in the morning at the head of the column. We marched at a swift pace often singing Italian folk songs. We would set the pace for the rest of the Italian prisoners of war who were behind us and were not always as tidy and in such a good mood as the four of us were.

Benito and Nemo, whom everybody jokingly called by the nickname "*Frattellini*"<sup>7</sup> because they were always together in the factory and in the camp, were also lucky to work together as electricians helping one German electrician in his work. So, compared to the other Italian prisoners of war, the four of us had easy work that didn't make us tired. Our friend Pierin Panzeri was not as lucky. From the second day of heavy work unloading the coal from the railroad platforms he was tired and could not keep the pace with us in the first row. And he left us to march in the last rows of the column, where were all those who were dragging their feet from being tired on the job, undernourished, or in poor health.

When we arrived in the camp in Laband, the first thing I did was to hide my camera, so no one could find it easily. I fastened it under one board of my lower bunk bed. Bruno was sleeping on the second level and Pierin on the lower level of the bed next to mine. One day, in the winter of 1943-44, I took my camera to the factory and asked Rufin to take a picture of Bruno and me<sup>8</sup> sitting at the bench in our workshop. Rufin admired my camera and asked me if I would like to exchange it for bread and other foodstuff that he would bring me in small amounts every week. I was more than happy to accept his proposal for such an exchange. Rufin Swizsi and his wife Lidia lived in the apartment in the small Polish town of Michalkowice.<sup>9</sup> He traveled every day on the streetcar to work and was able to bring from home any food that his wife could find on the market.

The food given to us in the camp was not sufficient for the young men. The meager daily diet consisted of *ersatz* coffee in the morning, watery soup made from huge turnips and lightly thickened with some kind of flour twice a day, and a piece of dark bread in the evening. On Sunday at lunch we received one boiled potato, a slice of boiled salami, a pat of margarine, and one tablespoon of sugar. It was adding a little to the weekly diet. Also, because all three of us, Bruno, Pierin, and I didn't smoke, we exchanged the three cigarettes that we received weekly with our smoking fellow prisoners for a slice of bread. We all lost a lot of weight, but Pierin, who was working hard outside in the cold weather, was exhausted, pale, and depressed. I was glad that I could in some small way help him with the food that Rufin was bringing me in exchange for my camera.

Usually Rufin brought me bread, sliced boiled salami, or *wurst* sausages, or lard. I was dividing all the food in equal parts for the three of us. Although the quantities of the

extra food that each of us had were small, it added some substance to our diet. But most of all it lifted our spirits for several weeks. We ate it in the evening, sitting not at the table where the others could see us, but hiding on Pierin's bed and mine, so no one would report on us to our interpreter Cosso that we were getting food from somewhere or from somebody. It was known that he used his position with the Germans to his advantage and we were afraid that he would blackmail us to get him part of the food; even worse, he could get Rufin and us in trouble by reporting us to the *Lagerfuhrer*.

Cosso was the interpreter for the German *Lagerfuhrer*, and he had spies in all the barracks. Although in our camp there was an Italian warrant officer, who was officially supposed to be in charge of the enlisted men, Cosso behaved as if he was the boss in our camp. The ability to communicate in German with the *Lagerfuhrer* and the guards was giving him the advantage of manipulating facts and orders, and giving him power over other Italian prisoners of war who could not speak German. It was known that Cosso often abused men verbally and physically for trivial reasons. Witnesses recounted that once when the warrant officer disagreed with Cosso about something and insisted that it be done his way, Cosso did not hesitate to hit his superior in rank in the face with the fist.

The *Lagerfuhrer* was very demanding that the floors in the barracks be cleaned and in the winter the slag from the burned coal was removed from the heating stove every evening. On a rotation basis, two men from each room had to do this job after they returned from twelve hours of work in the factory. One evening this was not done in our barrack, because the two slackers decided that they could get away with it. Well, the German guard who came to check it decided to give us a lesson. He ordered all of us to get out of the barrack; then he pulled all the slag from the stove and dropped it on the floor, and then brought two buckets of water and splashed it all over the slag, making a big mess on the floor. After that he ordered the two culprits to clean it. We all had to stay outside in the cold until the slackers had finished cleaning the floor. Since that night we certainly made sure that this chore was done promptly also because we needed that the stove was working well.

During cold weather there were many things that the men would do around the warm stove. Some would just sit close to it and warm themselves after a long day working outside in the cold. Others would place their socks near it to dry quicker than on the edge of their bunk bed. And there were those who would boil water or heat the remnants of the morning ersatz coffee. One young man, whom somebody gave the nickname Crostino<sup>10</sup> and it stuck to him, used the stove on Sundays. He used to collect from everybody the skins from boiled potatoes that we got for lunch every Sunday. He pressed the skins together to make himself a flat pancake, which he roasted well on the surface of the stove, making a crispy crust on both sides. Then he would eat it slowly savoring it as a fine delicacy.

After the supplements of food brought by Rufin in exchange for my camera came to a halt, we returned to the meager diet of prisoners of war. Bruno and I had a sheltered place of work and twelve hours in the warm telephone workshop, and occasional repairs of cables outside did not drain our physical strength. It was a different situation with our friend Pierin. He was returning exhausted after twelve hours of unloading coal in the cold weather. I began to think that to keep him from completely losing his strength and seeing him become ill, maybe the time had come to exchange the wedding ring, which

Pierin gave me as a present for food. I took my military jacket and unbuttoned the breast pocket where I kept the ring fastened with the safety pin. It was not there. I was in a panic. Nobody else beside Pierin knew that I had the ring and where I kept it. Only a few weeks back I had checked my pocket and the ring was there.

At night I kept my jacket well folded under my pillow. The only time it was unattended for a short time was when I was washing myself in the morning or taking a shower. But there was always either Pierin or Bruno near our bunk beds. When I told Pierin about the disappearance of the ring, he seemed to be as surprised about it as I was. But he didn't fuss much about it, he just told me, "If it is gone, you cannot do anything about it." It remained a mystery for a long time for me, how that ring could have disappeared. Several years later I figured out that since no one else knew that I had it and where I kept it, no one else could have taken it but my friend Pierin. Well, it was his present after all and he probably found a way to exchange it for food.

One evening when there were several men around the stove, I also came there for some reason, which I don't remember. I vaguely recall that either I knocked something off the stove, or did something else wrong. The fact was that the hungry men's tempers were always on edge and I just happened to be near the wrong man at the wrong time; he became mad at me and I answered him back. Well, I got myself in trouble. There was a big and loud fight, table and benches were knocked down on the floor, and there was lots of screaming and noise. Finally Bruno and Benito together with some others pulled us apart and led us to our bunk beds.

I sat on the edge of my bed breathing heavily and trying to catch my breath. I saw my dear friend Pierin, lying completely relaxed on his bed in front of me. He slowly opened his eyes, looked at me, and in an innocent tone of voice asked me, "What happened?"

I couldn't believe that with all that noise that we made during the fight Pierin didn't hear anything and I answered him with a question, "Didn't you hear that I was screaming? Didn't you hear that a big fight was going on?"

"No, I was sleeping," he replied with calm indifference, as if it had happened not to me, Giulio, his friend, but to some stranger about whom he didn't care. And he turned on his side and closed his eyes again without bothering even to ask me if I was hurt, or the reason for the fight, or with whom I had a fight. I was very disappointed that he, whom I had considered for a long time to be my best friend, not only didn't come to help me out, but also was completely insensitive about what happened to me. Although I tried in my mind to find some explanation for his strange behavior, this incident put a deep crack in my friendship with Pierin.

One morning in the early spring of 1944 when we were forming a column to walk to the *Presswerke*, the German guard read several names from each barrack from the list and ordered them to remain in the camp without explaining why. Pierin was among those who were called. Before leaving for work, Bruno and I saluted him, "*Ciao!* We will see you later!" We guessed that maybe they had some job to do in the camp. But when we returned in the evening from work, we found out that all those men were transferred to another camp and after that we didn't hear anything about what happened to our friend Pierin.

The warm days of spring lifted the spirits of the young Italian men in the camp. Every Sunday afternoon they were gathering near the gate behind the barbwire fence

facing the road and were singing Italian songs. One of them played guitar and all who wanted to join them would sing. One of the most popular songs that became the trademark of the Italians was, "*T'aspetto bella sotto il monumento con una rosa in mano.*"<sup>11</sup> The passersby would stop and listen. After several weeks it became so popular that a small crowd was gathering to listen and clapping their hands in approval.

The English prisoners of war didn't work at the *Presswerke*; in fact, I think they didn't work at all. The English section of the *Lager* Laband was well isolated from the other sections with several layers of barbwire and a wide strip of land. They often received Red Cross food packages and looked in much better health than our Italian men. And there was almost no communication between them and the Italian prisoners of war.

Then there was a large section of the camp for Soviet prisoners of war. They were treated by the Germans as the lowest kind of war prisoners. Their rations of food were even smaller than ours. I remember that after a lunch was distributed to our Italian prisoners at twelve o'clock in the courtyard of the *Presswerke*, the Soviet prisoners of war would come and scrape their hands in the soup bin and clean up whatever remained attached to its walls. The majority of them worked on the heaviest types of jobs, either outside loading and unloading coal and other heavy items in the railroad cars, or inside the factory shoveling coal into the smelting furnaces of a building called *Ida Hot*. Most of them had been in captivity since 1941, and their Soviet Army uniforms and shoes were all worn out. They were bandaging rags over their shoes to protect themselves from the cold.

I remember one tragic incident that happened to three Soviet prisoners of war in the winter of 1943-44. These men were working at the railroad yard and cut a piece of the heavy rubber hose connecting the railroad cars to the brake system. They were caught and to try to justify their action said that they wanted to use the rubber to put soles on their shoes. But their excuses didn't work and they were accused of being saboteurs.

To give a lesson to the others, the Germans hanged them right in the *Presswerke* Laband yard and kept them hanging for three days so all could see the consequences of sabotage. When this happened, Bruno and I considered ourselves lucky that we were not caught when we took a couple of old airplane valves lying on the floor of the *Werkstatt*. Inside the valves were some nickel parts, which we removed; on a small lathe and drilling machine in the telephone workshop we made ourselves rings with our prisoner of war numbers inscribed on them.

On the floor of *Werkstatt* we also found some bolts and took one of them. We sawed it in pieces and were experimenting with shaping them on the lathe to make something—I don't even remember what. But I remember that *Il Baffone*,<sup>12</sup> one of our Italian men whom we had given this name because he had a big mustache similar Stalin's, told us that his boss Sova had searched desperately for that bolt and finally ordered him to make a new one when it could not be found.

"Can you imagine," I told Bruno, "what could have happened to us if somebody saw us taking that bolt?"

Talking about *Werkstatt* I remember that it had all kinds of special machines: lathes, milling machines, boring machines, welding equipment, and then there were the workbenches with vises and all kinds of hand tools. Everywhere were piles of various

metals, from aluminum, copper, and steel rods to blocks of iron, steel, and all kinds of special metal alloys.

The Master of the *Werkstatt*, Herr Sova, didn't pay much attention to keeping the hall neat. But he was a skilled master of all metal trades. Although his poor eyesight did not allow him to do the job himself anymore, he was very good in guiding the workers step-by-step in the production of custom-made parts. His thick eyeglasses in a dark heavy round frame made him resemble a real owl, which his name Sova meant in Polish. He was a tall and bony man, but the workers soon discovered that his size didn't matter because he was a good-natured person and they were not afraid of him.

Only men worked in the *Werkstatt* and they were of several nationalities, but the majority was Polish from the surrounding towns and Italian prisoners of war. They were all skilled workers who knew how to operate more than one machine. Their job was to custom-make from a block of metal an exact copy of the original part with the precision that would allow the new part to work as a substitute for the damaged part of any kind of machinery or any kind of weapon.

The men in the *Werkstatt* often made jokes on behalf of Master Sova and made him upset; they knew that he would scream and curse them, but would never really punish them. I remember one prank that *Il Baffone* played on his boss. Because of the noise from many machines in the *Werkstatt*, it was hard to hear somebody unless he was very close to you. The lathe on which *Il Baffone* worked was not far from the telephone booth, which Sova often used to communicate with other departments.

Well, one day when Sova was talking on the telephone, *Il Baffone* rolled a heavy metal part close to the booth door and then continued to work on his lathe like nothing happened. When Sova tried to get out of the booth, he could not open the door. *Il Baffone* could hear his boss banging on the door, but he continued to work. Everybody in the *Werkstatt* had fun observing as their master was banging on the door trying to get out.

Finally, Sova called someone from another department on the telephone to come and help him to get out. *Il Baffone*, who was the closest there, was ordered to remove the heavy metal piece.

The tall and skinny Sova, with the heavy dark rim glasses, got out of the booth, all red in the face, his eyes almost coming out of their sockets, making him look even more like an owl. He screamed and swore at *Il Baffone*, accusing him of faking that he could not hear his bangs.

*Il Baffone* justified himself by touching his ears with his hands, explaining that the noise in the *Werkstatt* did not allow him to hear his boss. But he didn't deny that it was he who put that heavy metal piece near the telephone booth door and apologized for not seeing that his boss was inside.

*Il Baffone* knew that Sova appreciated him as a very good lathe operator on whom he could count to make the most complicated piece of work. Therefore, he wasn't really afraid of his boss's screaming at him. But it was worth it to see that scene and everybody in the *Werkstatt* had fun with his prank.

Well, Master Sova also knew that it was a joke at his expense and he screamed and cursed but at the end he accepted the apology; *Il Baffone* was a very skillful worker and the master needed him more than anybody else in the shop and he could not afford to punish him.

One day in the beginning of summer 1944 a young girl from the drafting office came to our telephone workshop to ask Emile about a tool that she needed to be repaired for her work. Only the three of us, Emile, Bruno and I, were there. Although she and Emile talked in German, they knew from their accents that both of them were foreigners. Of course, they asked each other the usual question, "Where are you from?" She answered that she was from the Soviet Union, commonly referred to as Russia. And Emile told her that he was French and presented Bruno and me as Italians. So we all got acquainted about our nationalities and learned each other's first names. Her name was real pretty Russian name, Olga.

It was the first Russian that I met in person and I became very curious because I could ask many questions about the life in Russia. From her first-hand experience she could tell me if anything was true in all those articles that I read in the fascist newspapers. I suspected that most of the writings were just fascist propaganda against communism.

Well, I could not speak German and could ask only a few short questions in French, and Emile translated them in German. Then Emile translated her answers in German to me in French. It was an awkward way of communicating. However, she told us that her mother was a teacher of French and her father was also a teacher. This made me think that it was an educated family that could tell about real life in Russia under the communist regime. Meanwhile, Emile assigned me to repair her drafting tool and I told her to return to pick it up the next day. And when she was leaving, she said to all of us in French, "*Au revoir*."

She had to return twice until the tool was working well. When she returned, she asked Emile if she could sometime come to the workshop to practice conversation in French, which she said she was studying with her mother. And Emile, who saw my interest in talking to her, referred her to me for French tutoring.

That's how my curiosity about the life in the Soviet Union led me to meet this Russian girl, and later when our status as prisoners of war had been changed to foreign workers, to also meet her family.

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1. Town in southwestern Italy.
  2. Damned Italian man [in German].
  3. Italian Military Corps especially trained and equipped for the mountain warfare.
  4. Italian popular song "We would get married in May, with many roses, with many roses..."
  5. A small town on former Polish territory annexed by Germany in 1939.
  6. Northwestern region of Poland annexed by Germany during World War II.
  7. The Little Brothers - in Italian.
  8. From the preserved photograph.
  9. A small town near the town of Katowitz, both annexed to Germany in 1939.
  10. Derisive name derived from "crust."
  11. "I will be waiting for you, the pretty one, near the monument with a rose in my hand..."
  12. "Big Mustache", as Stalin was called [in Italian].



## Part Ten

### Chance, Destiny, Or the Will Of God



# The Prince Of My Dreams

By Olga Gladky Verro

At the end of August, 1944 the status of the Italian prisoners of war was changed<sup>1</sup> to *Auslandsbriefverkehr*, as were called the foreign workers. They remained in the same camp and were given the same food, but now they were allowed to go to and from factory on their own without the armed guard and could stay out of the camp until eleven o'clock at night. They were allowed to go to the movies and to visit with the other foreign workers living in the camp or in the workers' hamlet.

From the first day the Italians got their new status, the *Frau* Maria's Italian admirer, Benito, waited for her at the main entrance to our drafting office and walked with us from the *Presswerke* to the door of *Frau* Maria's apartment house.

The next day *Frau* Maria told me, "You should try to casually encounter Giulio when he is leaving the *Werkstatt*, so you may walk with him from work."

Well, I considered her suggestion and watched from the window of our office to see when Giulio would come out. I rushed down the stairs; he was walking so fast that I could not catch up with him and I didn't want to call him.

On the third day *Frau* Maria told me to come with her downstairs where Benito was waiting outside. She told him to watch for Giulio and when he came out of the *Werkstatt* door to invite him to walk with us. Benito understood what *Frau* Maria was trying to do and when Giulio came out he saluted him, "*Ciao*,<sup>2</sup> Giulio. Where is your friend Bruno?"

"*Ciao*," answered Giulio. "Bruno has somebody else to walk with."

"Come with us," Benito invited him. "This is *Frau* Maria," he presented her to Giulio. "And I think that already you know Olga."

"Of course," replied Giulio, "I am her tutor of French." Then he turned toward me and said in French, "We have plenty of time to have a nice French conversation."

"And maybe to translate something for me to *Frau* Maria," added Benito.

As we walked, our conversation was in four languages, Russian, French, German, and Italian. *Frau* Maria and I found out that both Benito and Giulio lived in the camp in the same barrack called "Susi" in Room Number 95. They told us that they were both in Greece when the Germans took them as prisoners of war.

*Frau* Maria found out that Benito was a shoemaker and that he lived in a small town near the city of Venice in the northeastern part of Italy.

I found out that Giulio was a telephone repairman and that he lived in the city of Turin in the Piedmont region near the Alps Mountains in northern Italy.

As we arrived at the camp gate, Benito told Giulio that he was accompanying *Frau* Maria to the door of her apartment building. Giulio also came to accompany me. In the next few days of that week the four of us continued to return together from work. On Saturday *Frau* Maria got the courage to invite Benito to visit her on Sunday evening in her apartment; however, she asked me to come too and be her chaperone.

On the second week Giulio told me that he was interested in meeting my Russian family; he especially wanted to talk with my mother who spoke French well. By this time I had begun to like this young Italian man and wanted to know more about his life and

his family. I asked my parents if I could invite him to meet them. Having their consent, I invited Giulio to come for a cup of tea in the early afternoon on Sunday.

For that special occasion of Giulio's first visit to meet my family I wore my best dress of blue crepe de Chine with the lace jabot. It had a well-fitted bodice and was slightly gathered at the waistline. It showed my figure well and I felt elegant for the occasion. My mother prepared the ersatz coffee and baked some cookies. Giulio behaved like a real gentleman and my mother and father were very impressed with his impeccable manners. Although Giulio spoke reasonably good French, my mother told him that he spoke it with an Italian accent.

"Mother," I reproached her, "did you expect that an Italian would speak in perfect Parisian French?"

It was a nice sunny autumn day and Giulio suggested that we go out for a walk. I was excited to finally be alone with him for the first time. As we walked slowly side by side chatting in French, Giulio told me that he had a very good time with my family and away from the oppressive camp atmosphere, that he was glad to meet my parents and, most of all, that he enjoyed my company.

Giulio heard that my parents were calling me Lyalya and asked me, "May I call you Lala too?" I corrected his pronunciation, but he couldn't pronounce the Russian sound "Lya" and it always came out "La".

After several attempts I told him, "Never mind, Lala sounds very nice, I like it. Call me by that name."

My French by this time was good enough to communicate quite well and I answered most of the questions that Giulio was asking about my life. He was very surprised to hear that in college I had studied electrical engineering, which was an uncommon field for Italian women. About himself, Giulio told me that he lived in Turin with his mother and father and that his younger brother Domenico had gotten married when Giulio was in Greece.

We walked all the way to the small town park and sat down to rest on the bench under the trees. I felt so happy to be in Giulio's company and I felt that he perceived it without words. We watched the sundown together and then we walked back slowly arm-in-arm. We returned to the hamlet before it was dark.

When we entered the main entrance of my apartment house Giulio thanked me for the pleasant afternoon and before leaving gave me a gentle kiss on the cheek. At that moment I knew that I had found the prince of my dreams.

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1. See the chapter "Italian Armistice."

2. "Hi!" [in Italian].

## It Is Wonderful To Be In Love

By Olga Gladky Verro

One Sunday when Giulio and I returned from our afternoon walk, my mother told me that *Frau* Maria had come twice to see if I was home. "She asked me to tell you that she is waiting for you," said my mother, "that you promised her to come this evening for

dinner."

"Yes, I know. I just came to tell you that I am going there."

"Where have you been?" *Frau* Maria reproached me at the door. "Benito is already here."

"Oh," I replied all excited, "I had a wonderful time with Giulio! We have been together the whole afternoon!" *Frau* Maria was so preoccupied with her visitor that she told me that I could tell her all about it tomorrow on our way to work.

Benito was sitting on the chair and was surprised to see me. "*Ciao*, Benito," I greeted him in Italian and jokingly tousled with fingers his neatly combed wavy black and shiny hair. Once lifted the hair stood up in bunches glued together by abundant oil dressing that made my fingers greasy and sticky. Benito looked so funny that both, *Frau* Maria and I couldn't stop laughing. He felt embarrassed and quickly pulled a comb out of his pocket and began to rearrange his hairdo.

He didn't dare to show me his disapproval and, seeing that it did put us both in a good mood, explained, "We Italians use heavy transformer oil to keep our hair in place. That's all that we could find at the factory to use as a hairdressing."

*Frau* Maria served the supper of boiled potatoes with a condiment of onions fried in margarine; for dessert she made some kind of a pudding and a cup of ersatz coffee. For those days it was a real treat, especially compared to the food the Italians got in the camp.

Benito knew a few German words and phrases and in communicating with us combined them with gestures and facial expressions. I was using some French words hoping that they sounded similar in Italian. *Frau* Maria resorted to gracious flirting, mimicry, and simple German expressions, most of which Benito could understand. Thus, in a primitive way we were able to keep some conversation going all the time.

After dinner, when *Frau* Maria was clearing the table, Benito—without saying a word—gave me a supplicating look and indicated with a finger that he wanted me to go home and leave him alone with her. I nodded in a sign of agreement and said, "*Frau* Maria, it is time for me to go home." She tried to convince me to stay a little bit longer, but I decided that Benito had the right to have some time without a chaperone. To my surprise, *Frau* Maria told to a disappointed Benito that it was also time for him to leave.

"I am sorry," I told Benito as we were walking down the stairs, "you should have patience with *Frau* Maria; she needs to know you better." I don't know if he understood my words, but my tone of voice was conveying the excuse for my friend's action.

In the weeks that followed the Italians received the new *Lager-Ausweis*<sup>1</sup> with the 11 P.M.<sup>2</sup> turn-in time written by hand on the top of it.

I remember one unusual event when Giulio and his friend Bruno Zanobini were invited for a dinner in the home of their German coworker *Herr* Kramer. Giulio told me that they ate sausages, sauerkraut, potatoes, and finished the dinner with a cup of ersatz coffee. It was indeed very unusual, because most Germans didn't associate themselves with the Italians even after their status had changed to foreign workers. But, as Giulio told me, when they had the status of prisoners of war, *Herr* Kramer was the only one who shared half of his sandwich with Bruno and him when there were no other German workers in the shop.

Giulio became a regular visitor in my home on Sunday afternoons and I couldn't go anymore to be *Frau* Maria's chaperone for Benito's visits. But on the day when Giulio

was invited to *Herr Kramer* I was free and came to see *Frau Maria* while Benito was there. Now she was relaxed with her admirer and I saw that she allowed him a few tender liberties in my presence that indicated they had reached a stage of intimacy which she hadn't told me about. She and Benito were in a good mood and were openly showing it.

"You are both very happy," I told Benito.

"Yes, we are," he replied and asked me, "Are you happy with Giulio? Did you make a serious commitment to each other?"

"I am happy," I answered, "I am very fond of him. I don't know yet how serious Giulio is about me. We never talk about the future, we are content to be together now."

"You should think about the future," replied Benito, like a wise older man giving advice to a young girl. "Giulio is a fine young man who could make you very happy. He is honest and fair with everybody. You can trust him." Then he reflected for a moment and added, "He knows how to do everything and he would take good care of you. I am sure that he would treat you like a queen."

"It is good to hear all these nice things about Giulio," I replied. "But I would not spoil the happiness that I have now by urging Giulio to make a commitment for the future, which neither of us can predict."

For a while *Frau Maria* and I had felt comfortable being alone with our men, and now most of the time we walked home from the factory in pairs at our own pace, *Frau Maria* with Benito and I with Giulio.

Now every Sunday afternoon Giulio stayed with us for lunch, or for supper, and after the meal we were going out either for a long walk or to the movies. It was a time that we were learning about each other, oblivious of the war that was going on and not thinking about tomorrow. We were living only in the present. It was enough for us to be together to feel happy. Each day was bringing us closer and closer to each other; we knew that we were in love but neither Giulio nor I had said to each other "I love you." It was at that time that Giulio began to call me in Italian *Mia piccola Lala* – "My little Lala," a name that expressed his feelings for me. But I felt that Giulio had a very good reason for not rushing to declare in words his love for me and I didn't want to rush him until he was ready to tell.

On one Sunday we went walking in the park. It was a cold autumn evening and to keep us warm we walked arm-in-arm back and forth on a carpet of wet decaying leaves and grass. When I came home I discovered that I had lost my green necklace. On the next day after work, I went with Giulio to look for it. There was very little chance of finding it in the windy weather that was blowing the leaves and piling them against the trunks of the trees. I made a secret wish, "If we find the necklace, it shall be a good omen that Giulio and I shall love each other and be together for a long, long time." To my surprise, we found it very quickly; it was just lying there waiting for us. I became exuberant with joy. Giulio couldn't figure out why I was so happy; after all, it was a very inexpensive necklace. But I didn't reveal my secret wish to him.

Sometime in September Giulio asked me to give him my picture and I went to the photo-atelier and made a photo without my eyeglasses. On the twentieth of September 1944 we exchanged our photos. I wrote on the back of my recently made picture: "Remember your little Lala."<sup>3</sup>

Giulio gave me his photo made in Turin when he was on a furlough from the

Italian Air Force unit stationed in Greece. On the back of the photo he wrote: "To Lala, in memory of our great friendship."<sup>4</sup> On that picture he was so handsome, not skinny as he was now, and so elegant dressed in a well-tailored coat.

I showed the picture to *Frau* Maria, who commented, "Olga, he is so attractive! With a little bit of good food he will look like this again." Then she asked me, "Aren't you happy now that I sent you to meet him in the telephone workshop?"

"Yes," I confirmed. "If it wasn't for you, I would probably have never met him."

Then I showed her the inscription on the back of the photo and told her, "Look here, Giulio wrote to me to remember 'our great friendship.' But I am in love with him and he is not in love with me."

*Frau* Maria said with reassurance, "He is in love with you, too. But there must be something that prevents him from saying it. You should ask him what it is."

"No," I said, "I don't want to destroy the great happiness that we have. If he considers it to be a friendship, so be it. I prefer that he is honest with me, rather than deceiving me, or being forced to tell me something that he doesn't feel I should know."

*Frau* Maria said with the air of a woman experienced in the matters of men-women relationships, "I would never wait; I would take the initiative. I told you many times that a man needs encouragement from the woman. You are too timid with him. And you may regret it one day when it is too late."

Sometime in September 1944 the Allied bombers began daytime bombardments of the gasoline refineries of Haidelbreck,<sup>5</sup> that was not too far from Laband. We heard that those refineries were transforming coal into gasoline fuel.

At the *Presswerke* the air raid alarms would sound ahead of time before the air gradually filled with the ominous humming of a large number of Allied bombers. All workers from the *Presswerke* were directed to run for shelter in the nearby forest. Giulio and I would meet at the main door of the drafting office and he would take my hand and pull me to run faster.

In the forest people would disperse between the trees and bushes and listen with fear to the rumbling thunder of the explosions somewhere beyond the forest from very powerful bombs and probably from the explosion of the stored gasoline. No one knew if our factory would also be the target on that day.

Although I had experienced two years of shelling by the Soviet artillery in my hometown—but those were only shrapnel shells—I was overwhelmed with fear by the intensity and power of explosions from the Allies' bombardments. I would cling to Giulio, hiding my head on his chest, and he would tenderly embrace my small body giving me the protection that I was seeking. For the first time our physical closeness during the time of danger provided a silent communion between our souls and bodies. And the feeling of Giulio's warmth and tenderness would overwhelm me.

When we would hear the sound of the returning bombers and the factory would signal the end of the air raid, Giulio would gently kiss me on the cheek and reassure me, "It's all over, my little girl. They are gone." As we would slowly walk back to the factory, he would hold my hand and by squeezing it occasionally would reassure me that there was no more danger.

After several air raids, which always had the same target of fuel refineries and gasoline depots in Haidelbreck, Giulio told me with confidence, "I think that the Allies will not bother to drop bombs on our insignificant factory. From my experience in the

Legionary Air Force during the civil war in Spain<sup>6</sup> such bombardments are usually done on important targets. Therefore, we don't have to run in the forest as fast as we did during the first air raids. Let's imagine that this time is given to us as an outing in the forest and let's enjoy it by being together." And he was right. The Allies never bombarded *Presswerke Laband*.

As the autumn weather was becoming windy and chilly and the carpet of multicolored leaves in the forest was wet from the rains, during the air raids we would find a comfortable place to sit on a fallen tree trunk. Giulio would unbutton his double-breasted military coat and hold me tight by enveloping my small body in the warm heavy wool and keep my hands between the hot palms of his hands. We could feel our hearts beating and our lungs breathing and the feeling of tender affection and fondness would almost inebriate us. We knew that we were in love.

Our affectionate relationship didn't go unnoticed by Giulio's boss, the head of the *Presswerke Laband* Telephone Department, *Herr Kamionka*, who was also a Nazi Party boss of the *Presswerke Laband* factory. One late afternoon after work, when Giulio and I were walking through the factory gate, the guard stopped me and told me to go in the office to see *Herr Kamionka*.

Giulio and I looked at each other with surprise. He asked me, "What could he want from you? I will wait for you here."

After answering my greetings *Herr Kamionka* invited me very politely to sit down. In a fatherly, but strict tone of voice, he admonished me, "I was informed that one of the Italian young man who is working in the telephone workshop is courting you. As a *Volksdeutsche* you should not get involved with the Italians."

"*Herr Kamionka*," I replied quickly, "I am not a *Volksdeutsche*."

Surprised with my answer he asked, "Isn't *Herr Igor Gladki* your uncle?"

"Yes, he is," I answered and added, "My uncle is a *Volksdeutsche*, because his wife's father was German. My father, mother, and I are Ukrainians. We were transferred to the *Presswerke* as specialist foreign workers. Now the Italians also have the status of foreign workers. There are no restrictions for foreign workers on making friends with the other nationalities."

*Herr Kamionka* reflected for a few seconds and then suggested in a conciliatory way, "Well, as a relative of the *Volksdeutsche* it would be better if you find yourself a German young man and you could become a *Volksdeutsche* too."

"It is not so easy," I replied. "All the German young men are fighting the war and many German women are waiting for them."

*Herr Kamionka* got up from his chair and I understood that it was the end of the audience and I got up too. But before I had a chance to salute him, he added, "I hope you will think seriously about this matter and ask the advice of your father and your uncle." Then he saluted me, "*Heil Hitler!*"

I answered, "*Auf Wiedersehen!*" and quickly left his office.

Giulio was waiting for me, anxious to find out what his boss wanted from me. When I told him about *Kamionka's* concern and his suggestion, Giulio became very upset and exclaimed, "Are you afraid of *Kamionka*? Who does he think he is to tell you whom you could or could not be friends with?! He knows that you have your father and mother who could tell you this." Then he paused for a moment and asked, "By the way, what do your parents say about me?"

"They both like you. They think that you are a fine young man. However, my father warned me not to become too serious about you because you are a soldier and when the war is over, it is expected that you will return home."

Giulio stopped and stood in front of me. Looking straight in my eyes he said, "As a father, he gave you the right advice. What are you going to do now? Will you stop seeing me?"

"Of course not!" I replied emphatically. "I am happy to be with you. Why should I stop seeing you? My father only gave me his advice. And Kamionka couldn't order me to stop seeing you when I told him that I am not a *Volksdeutsche*."

Giulio placed his hands on my cheeks and gave a long kiss on my lips, leaving me breathless. It was the first time that he kissed me on my lips and he did it with such fervor that I felt that he really cared for me. After this Giulio became more exuberant in showering me with affection.

By the time the snow fell on the ground, we couldn't make long walks anymore in the cold windy weather. Now Giulio was coming to see me in the evening several times a week. Most of the time he had supper with us and the four of us spoke in French for a while. Usually Giulio had many questions about our life under the communists' regime and my father was glad to educate him by telling him real life stories dating back to the years of the revolution and the civil war, and bringing him up-to-date until the time of war with Germany.

Giulio told us about the Spanish Civil War when he was a volunteer in the Legionary Air Force, who fought the communists. My father was very impressed to hear that Giulio was on the anti-communist side of the Spanish conflict. It immediately elevated my father's opinion about Giulio, because my father had very rigid standards about a person's political loyalties. For him there were only two kinds of people, the communists, whom he hated and whom he considered to be his enemies, or the anti-communists, whom he considered righteous persons with whom he could live in harmony.

When my parents would go to sleep in our room, Giulio and I stayed in the kitchen until quarter to eleven at night, just enough time for him to return to the camp before the curfew. We would sit close to each other and Giulio would embrace me and caress me gently and lovingly, once in a while kissing me. There were a few of those moments when we allowed ourselves to express our feelings freely, forgetting that we really were never alone; the two young Caucasian men who lived in the small room in our apartment were coming in and out of the kitchen anytime they wanted without knocking. They would come to put their teakettle on the stove, to make a tea, and to wash their cups. Sometimes it seemed that they did this with the purpose of annoying us, but they had the right to use the kitchen and we could not complain about it.

Then one evening before Giulio arrived the Caucasian men made a big fuss with my mother and father, saying that they were very annoyed to see Giulio in our kitchen in the evening. One of them said, "We are offended that your daughter is dating a foreigner, an Italian man. Both of us are tall and handsome men and we are your compatriots. Why didn't she choose one of us?"

And the other one added, "We are available right here in the apartment and we could keep her company in the evening."

Both of them spoke Russian with such a heavy Caucasian accent that I wanted to

tell them that to me they sounded more foreign than the Italian who spoke French with me. But my father didn't allow me to talk. He told me to go in our room and he and my mother persuaded the Caucasians that, since they had never showed an interest in me before, there was no reason for them to be offended.

One evening Giulio almost got in trouble for being a few minutes late in returning to the camp. The guard at the gate began to scream at him. From the guardroom Giulio heard on the radio the sound of the familiar tune: it was the famous aria from the opera "*Pescatori di Perle*."<sup>7</sup> Giulio said quietly to the guard, "Sh-sh-sh..." and he began to sing softly along with the music. The guard stopped screaming and allowed Giulio to listen to the end of the aria. Then he waved his hand and told him to hurry to the barrack. Love of music saved Giulio from punishment for returning to the camp after the curfew time.

It was sometime at that time that I told Giulio what meaning I had attached to finding the necklace when I lost it during one of our first walks in the park. Giulio said, "I remember that you were so excited when you found it and believed that it was dear to you as some kind of a souvenir."

He embraced me and looking lovingly in my eyes added with emotion in his voice, "But now I am so happy to know that you made such a wish then. This means that you already loved me then and wanted me to love you and to be with you for a long time. And now I can see in your eyes that you love me. Nobody has looked at me like this before." And he tenderly kissed my eyes several times. And for the first time he told me what I had been waiting for so long to hear. First, he said it in French, "*Je t'aime*." Then he said in Italian, "*Ti voglio bene*." And then he asked me to say it in Russian and repeated, "*Ya tyebya lyublyu*." But they all meant the same thing, "I love you."

On the twenty-second of December, 1944 we celebrated Giulio's birthday and as a surprise I invited his friend Bruno Zanobini to come and be with us for that occasion. My mother baked a simple cake and we had the ersatz coffee with sugar. I gave Giulio a gift, a long and narrow white scarf, which I crocheted from cotton yarn given to me by my aunt. Giulio tried it to see how it would look on him and we all laughed because it was so long that the ends were hanging below his knees. He wrapped it several times around his neck to make me happy that he could use it.

On that occasion Giulio gave me one of his photos that we made at the photo-automat and this time he wrote on the back of it: "*In un giorno felice, per un caro ricordo*" that meant "In one day of happiness, for a dear remembrance." And this expressed exactly the way we felt at that time; we were happy just being together. And I gave him my photo made on the same day.

On the twenty-fifth of December 1944, on German Christmas, we were invited to my uncle Igor's home in the afternoon for a dinner. But the festivities were somber and all we talked about was that the eastern front was moving fast toward the German territory. We all were concerned about what we would do when the Red Army came closer to Laband.

My aunt was pregnant and they expected the baby to be born sometime at the end of January. My uncle was insisting that his wife, children, and the old mother move to the western part of Germany to stay with the family of one of their good friends who were also *Volksdeutsche*. My aunt was accusing my uncle of wanting to get rid of her and the family and was refusing to leave without him. My uncle was trying to explain that he could not go with them because at that time only the families were allowed to

leave; the men had to remain to work at the factory. But my aunt stubbornly insisted that he could find a way if he wanted. We went home all upset about the bad news and with an unpleasant feeling that my uncle and his wife had problems in their marriage.

We invited Giulio to be with us on Christmas evening. As we had tea and cake that my mother baked, our conversation was centered again on the danger we were facing if the Red Army continued to push Germans on their own soil.

On the last day of December, 1944 Giulio and I walked all the way to the Laband railroad station to buy a flask of beer at the tavern. It was a very cold evening and to keep ourselves warm we walked fast, making the dry snow squeak under our feet. The frost was biting my cheeks and Giulio was complimenting me that they were like the two ripe red apples and he stopped right in the middle of the road and kissed them.

That evening, on the eve of the New Year, Giulio participated in our old Ukrainian tradition of foretelling what the New Year would bring to each of us. In the candlelight we watched the shadow on the wall from a burning paper bunched and placed on a dish and guessed what that shadow resembled. My mother was worried about the Soviet Army, which was already in the nearby Polish territory, and she was seeing in the shadows a long procession of people carrying bags on their backs. This was confirming her conviction about the bad times ahead when she would be escaping with the others from the advancing Red Army. I saw the long train with smoke coming from the engine's chimney and my mother interpreted it for me that I would travel in the New Year. Giulio, who didn't believe in this nonsense, was making fun by telling us that he was seeing all kinds of strange things in the shadows.

Then Giulio and I ran out in the street to throw away an old dish, another tradition that meant to throw away all the troubles of the past year. That night there was no restriction of eleven o'clock to be back at the camp. At one second after midnight on January 1, 1945 we celebrated our very first New Year with Giulio. We toasted with watered down beer that the German tavern-keeper was selling to the foreigners. On that occasion we all embraced each other wishing, "Happy New Year." And for the first time Giulio kissed me in the presence of my parents, wishing that we could celebrate many New Years together in the future.

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1. From the preserved camp pass card.
  2. *Sperrstunde 21:00 Uhr* [in German].
  3. From the inscription on the photo.
  4. From the inscription on the photo.
  5. Not sure of the exact name of that town.
  6. See the chapter "Volunteer in the Italian Air Force."
  7. "*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*," by Georges Bizet.

## The Soviet Army Is Advancing

By Olga Gladky Verro

During the first three weeks of January, 1945 every day was bringing bad news from the front line, mostly by word of mouth from the German civilians who were

packing the trains going west. Newspapers were not revealing the truth about what was going on either on the eastern or on the western fronts. In the *Presswerke Laband* work was going on as usual. The German workers who were used to discipline and to obeying orders, were all coming to work and the foreign workers had no choice but to come to work. The Soviet prisoners of war were led to work by heavy armed guards.

The nighttime alarms were becoming routine. Giulio was coming now every evening to stay with me and we would run in the cellar together with the others to hide until there was an all-clear signal. We would stand somewhere in a dark corner and Giulio would embrace me and hold me close, kissing me gently once in a while. We found out later that the alarms were just for training the population for the real ones to be expected in the future.

Many Germans and *Volksdeutsche* were sending their families further into the interior of Germany. But my uncle Igor was not able to convince his wife to evacuate before all trains were declared to be reserved for the military and no civilians could board them anymore. The news was now very grim.

By the middle of January, by foot and with all kinds of hand-pulled sleds and carts, whole families, many with children, and many single men were traveling through Laband. They were not only Germans and *Volksdeutsche*, but also Russians, Ukrainians, Estonians, Byelorussians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Polish, and other nationalities that were escaping from being captured by the Soviets. They were telling stories that in all places occupied by the Red Army all Soviet citizens, that included all nationalities, were ordered to register at once with the NKVD and all men were immediately taken by the NKVD agents and sent somewhere, probably to fight on the front line, or maybe directly to concentration camps in Siberia.

Sometime after the middle of January we had a family council with my uncle Igor in our apartment and we decided to follow the other families and to leave Laband before the Red Army captured the town. Igor was uncertain how he could do it with his big family and wife, who was due to deliver their baby at any time now. He kept his options open, although it was most likely that his family would not be able to leave.

I told Giulio about our decision to leave Laband by foot and that we needed a sled to carry some of our belongings. Giulio took it upon himself to make a sled at the *Presswerke*. He made the parts in the *Werkstatt*, where he could find any kind of metal lying around. He brought the separate parts piece by piece tied to his body under his large military coat, and then he assembled the sled in our apartment.

Toward the end of the third week of January an order came mobilizing all able-bodied German men for the civil defense of the *Presswerke* and the town of Laband. Giulio told me that three German men, Kochalla, Kramer, and Kiklas, had left as part of a civil defense unit from his telephone workshop.

The stream of the refugees coming through the town continued, but there was no way to find out exactly how far from Laband the Red Army was. However, the general perception was that it was very close. The *Presswerke* continued to operate although there was an atmosphere of uncertainty about how long it could continue with so many German men mobilized into civil defense and only the foreign workers doing the work.

My mother and I had begun to pack our clothing and food to be ready at any moment to take off. Then my mother had another strong attack of sciatica; she couldn't walk and had to stay in bed with a hot water bottle for pain relief. My aunt Antonina

Yuliyevna was ready to give birth at any moment. The weather continued to be very cold and windy. Nobody in my uncle Igor's family, pregnant wife, old mother, or two small children, could go out in such bad weather on the road to walk; in our family my mother was in no condition to be moved.

My mother and I decided that we would remain in Laband. We told my father that as a man he was in immediate danger. We were convinced that he couldn't survive if he was sent to the front, or to a concentration camp in Siberia. We told him that he had no choice but to save himself and go west when the time came. After all, it would not be the first time that we were separated and found each other again. At least we could hope that he would remain alive.

I told Giulio about my mother's and my decision to remain in Laband and he was happy to hear it. He commented, "It will give us more time to be together." But he didn't believe the stories that the Soviets grabbed all men and made them disappear. However, he told me that when the time came for my father to leave, he would come and stay with my mother and me.

As the Soviet Army was coming closer and closer to Laband, the German men in the local civil defense unit took positions with machine guns on the roofs of the *Presswerke Laband* buildings and with rifles on the perimeter of the factory, on the railroad station, along the canal, and in some other strategic points in town. By the twenty-first of January, 1945 all work at the *Presswerke Laband* had stopped and no foreign workers were admitted. Giulio came to our apartment and told us that the English and Russian prisoners of war were kept heavily guarded in the barracks behind the barbwire fence in the *Kriegsgefangene*<sup>1</sup> camp. But the foreign workers were allowed to go in and out of the camp without restrictions.

By this time everybody knew that the end of the German occupation of that part of Poland was imminent. Some foreign workers who lived in the camp or in the workers' hamlet were Soviet sympathizers, especially the French, including Emile from the telephone workshop, and they were waiting to be liberated by the Soviet Army from the Germans.

The Polish, who though glad to see the Germans being chased from the Polish territory, were not very happy to see the Soviets take their place. But the Soviet citizens were terrified about the arrival of the Soviet Army. They knew what to expect as a punishment for just being in Germany during the war. Therefore, men and many families were ready to leave Laband and walk west to escape being captured by the NKVD.

My mother and I insisted that my father leave without us, since my mother was not improving and could not walk due to her attack of sciatica. In my uncle Igor's family the situation was more complicated. On the twenty-second of January, 1945 my aunt gave birth to a healthy baby boy, whom my uncle registered in the Laband Townhall as Walter Gladki.

That day, toward late afternoon the bad news had spread like wildfire among the population of Laband: "The Soviet Army has captured several towns east of Laband." Uncle Igor came to talk to my father, asking him what he intended to do. The two young Caucasian men who lived in the small room in our apartment came home and frantically rushed to pack their belongings. When they were ready to leave, they came in the kitchen to say good-bye to us.

"We are leaving right away to make some kilometers before the darkness of the

night," one said.

And the other warned my father and uncle Igor who was there, "If you don't want to be captured by the Soviets, you better hurry and leave. In two to three days they will be in Laband. We have the information from very reliable sources." And they left in a hurry.

My father looked at his brother and said, "Little brother, it's time to go! If you join me, we will leave early tomorrow morning."

"It is easy for you to say," answered Igor. "Your wife and daughter understand what danger awaits you if you are captured by the Soviets. I cannot convince my wife that I have no other choice... She doesn't understand that if I remain here she will lose me anyway. Before, I was not able to convince her to evacuate with the children. Now, with the newborn baby she has to stay behind only because she was so stubborn, refusing to leave without me."

"Well, if you decide to go, be here before five o'clock in the morning," said my father, "so we can slip out of town before dawn." As Uncle Igor was leaving, he didn't say "Good-bye", but just confirmed the time of the departure, "Five o'clock tomorrow morning."

My mother prepared a small backpack for my father with warm underwear and socks, a few shirts, and one extra pair of slacks. He didn't want to have much to carry. She also packed him the bread and lard that we had.

When Giulio came late in the afternoon, I told him that my father and his brother would be leaving early tomorrow morning.

Giulio could not understand how my father could leave his wife and daughter and run away alone. And when he heard that my uncle was joining him, leaving his wife, newborn son, two small children, and the old Babushka behind, he was appalled.

"Giulio," I tried to reason with him, "it is a matter of survival. It happened to us once before when the Soviets recaptured our hometown; both my father and uncle Igor left and we and his family remained home. When the danger had passed, they returned. And now, if they remain here, we will lose them anyway. If they can keep from being captured by the Soviets, we can hope that they will remain alive and free and maybe one day can reunite with us."

Giulio stayed most of the afternoon and he promised that after my father left he would come and stay with my mother and me. He inspected the small room left in disarray by the two Caucasian men and concluded that all it needed was a good cleaning. Then he asked my mother and me if we would agree that his friend Bruno could also come to stay with us. We told him that it was even better if both of them stayed. And Giulio went to the camp to talk it over with Bruno. When Giulio came in the evening, he told us the good news, "Bruno agreed to stay with me in your apartment."

My father was pleased to hear that two men would be staying with us. By this time he knew Giulio better and liked him. And he had also met Bruno, who was not a stranger to him. I think that knowing we would not be alone reassured him somewhat. But he was very nervous and was smoking one cigarette after another; my mother didn't dare to send him on the staircase to smoke, as she usually did before saying that the smoke was giving her a headache. I asked my father to give me a cigarette, believing I would impress Giulio by learning to smoke. My father handed me a cigarette and I somewhat awkwardly put it between my lips. My father was ready to light it for me when

I saw Giulio looking at me reproachfully; then said sternly, "Lala, don't you start this bad habit!"

"I thought that you would like to see me as an emancipated woman," I justified myself and I returned the cigarette to my father.

"No, I like you as you are," answered Giulio, pleased that I had obeyed his wish.

My father asked Giulio to write his Italian address in his small notebook where there were the addresses of Zoya Litvinova in Germany and of Monsieur Demey in France. "Maybe among the three of these addresses we can find each other," said my father with hope in his voice.

Giulio wrote his Italian address and giving it to my father said, "After the war ends, write to me and I will write to you where Lala and your wife are and what has happened to them."

That evening Giulio left early. My father and Giulio said "Good-bye" to each other, first by shaking their hands and then by spontaneously embracing each other.

My father said to Giulio, "Take care of Lyalya. Cherish and protect her."

Giulio promised him, "Don't you worry, I shall take care of both of them." And before going back to the camp he wished my father a good journey.

When Giulio kissed me at the door, he said to me with reassurance, "Don't you worry, I will be here early in the morning. Bruno will come the day after tomorrow. He wants to spend one day more with his girlfriend Rosette."

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1. Prisoners of war camp [in German].

## Giulio Comes to Stay With Us

By Olga Gladky Verro

On January 22, 1945 my father and uncle Igor left Laband before dawn. Knowing that our chances of seeing each other again were very improbable, we embraced in tears and kissed them and said good-bye like they were leaving us forever. Uncle Igor asked us to give some emotional support to his wife during the first days, which would be hard for her after he was gone. From the open door I watched through the tears in my eyes as they walked down the stairs. When I closed the door, my mother was standing in the middle of the kitchen crying. We embraced each other and stood consoling each other. Finally, my mother said, "We made the right decision to tell your father to go—at least he has a chance to survive."

Early in the morning, Giulio came from the camp as he had promised. He brought his military backpack containing all his possessions. He dropped it in the middle of the kitchen floor, embraced me, and simply said, "Lala, I am here to stay."

After having our first breakfast together, Giulio and I began get the small room ready for him and for Bruno. Right away Giulio showed his experience in doing household chores by taking the initiative in what needed to be done to clean the room thoroughly and make it look neat and comfortable. He allowed me only to help him in finding all he needed to do the job: the broom, the rags, and a pail for water. "This is the

room where Bruno and I will be living," he said. "You don't have to clean it for us."

The first thing he did was to open the window saying, "Let the fresh air come in." My mother complained immediately about the cold air and we had to close both doors, the one to the kitchen and the other to the room. Then, from the open window Giulio shook vigorously and fluffed up the straw-filled pillows and mattresses and put them across the windowsill to freshen up. Meanwhile he cleaned the wooden bed frames with the wet rag, swept and washed the floor, and allowed me to clean the table and chairs. Finally, he made up his bed by using one of his military blankets as a bed sheet and covering it with another wool blanket. Bruno's bed he left undone until he brought his own blankets. Giulio accepted my help only to do the minor chores. And I remembered what Benito told me, "Giulio knows how to do everything and he will take good care of you... He will treat you like a queen."

My mother, with her sciatica pain, was complaining that we had left the window open for too long, allowing the whole apartment to become cold. She was sitting near the kitchen window watching outside and was reporting to us what was happening on our street.

The families that lived in the other apartments were leaving the hamlet in a panic. If the news had been about the spread of a pestilence epidemic, it wouldn't have provoked such an exodus, as did the news about the imminent arrival of the Soviet Army. Men, women, and children were carrying their few belongings in bags either on their backs or on sleds or carts, if they were fortunate to have them. They were hurriedly walking on the slippery road covered with packed snow.

Once in a while my mother would recognize somebody and call me to the window, "Look, look, Lyalya, they are also leaving and are taking their children in this cold weather. It looks like we will be among the few to remain here."

That morning our neighbor, the woman of the *Volksdeutsche* couple who lived in the apartment opposite our door on the same landing, came to talk to my mother. She asked if we had decided not to leave and would remain in our apartment.

"As you can see," answered my mother, "I cannot walk. My husband and his brother left very early this morning. Lyalya's friends, the two Italian young men, will stay with us."

"We are leaving now," said our neighbor, "but we don't know how far we will be able to go in this weather. Maybe we will have to come back. Could you watch our apartment? Here are the keys to it and to our cellar. If we don't return before the Soviets come, take everything that we have left and use it for you. We don't want it to be looted." She left in a hurry, wishing us good luck, and we wished her and her husband a safe journey.

After lunch Giulio and I went to see my aunt Antonina Yulyevna and the children. This was her second day after childbirth and she was already sitting up in the chair holding her newborn baby boy. Nanochka and Fredik were helping her and Babushka with the chores. Giulio told her that if they needed help with something they could not do by themselves, he would gladly help them. I was surprised to see the tenderness with which Giulio admired the little baby when he took him in his arms and how affectionate he was with Fredik and Nanochka. On our way home he told me that from the time he was a small boy he had liked babies and small children and loved to play with his little cousins.

My aunt complained to us that her husband had left her alone to take care of the children. "Your uncle is a coward," she said to me with resentment. "It is your father who convinced him that if they remained here their lives would be in danger. Oh! His arguments were very persuasive. Igor recited them all to me yesterday when he returned from your home." And my aunt repeated them with bitterness in her voice, "He said that if they were drafted in the Soviet Army, they would die on the front line. If they were taken as traitors to the Motherland, they either would be shot or deported to perish in the NKVD concentration camps."

Then she explained how she tried to argue with her husband, "I told Igor that maybe it could be true for his brother, who was Ukrainian, but since we are the *Volksdeutsche*, the Soviets would not draft him in the Red Army. And, if they would deport us back to the Soviet Union, so be it. At least we would be deported together as a whole family and would accept our destiny together." I translated to Giulio all that she said and he agreed with her.

When we were returning to our apartment, Giulio said to me, "I cannot believe that your uncle could just walk away from his wife and children."

I answered him with the question, "Do you think that it would have been better if the Soviets had taken him away from the family? At least now he might have a chance to be alive and maybe one day to reunite with them."

Giulio disagreed with me, unconvinced by my argument. "I think that those justifications are based only on rumors. We will see what will happen when the Soviets come."

Later that afternoon Antonina Yulyevna came to ask me if I could accompany her to Laband's town hall because she didn't speak German well and she wanted me to help her change the name of the baby from Walter to Igor.

"Why do you want to change his name?" I asked her.

"It is a German name and if we are deported to the Soviet Union, it would mark the boy as German for all his life. Don't you remember what they did to all my brothers? They all disappeared one by one only because they had German names."

We went to the town hall and found only two clerks, who decided that there was no harm in changing the name to Igor on the birth certificate registered only yesterday, and they issued her a new certificate.

Then I went across the street to see what happened to *Frau* Maria. Her apartment was empty and already ransacked. I couldn't find anything to take as a souvenir. "She must have been in an awful hurry to leave, I thought, because she didn't even come to say good-bye to me. Probably she left with somebody during the night."

Toward the evening the exodus from the hamlet seemed to stop, but now those who remained began to search in the abandoned apartments and to loot anything that was left in them. My mother told us to switch on the lights in our neighbor's kitchen to make it appear that it was not abandoned. We could hear late into the night the voices of people outside and could see from the windows the shadows carrying bundles on their backs. We left the light on all night in the kitchens of both apartments and did not go to sleep until very late.

We were expecting that the next morning Bruno would leave the camp and join Giulio to stay with us in our apartment.

# Chance, Destiny, Or the Will Of God

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

On January 24, 1945 we were awakened very early by the noise of sleds and carts and loud voices on our street. People were rushing in the search for loot, in small groups, as that was safer than venturing out alone. My mother was watching them from the kitchen window and commenting in French, "*Ils vont, ils vont. Ou ils vont?*"<sup>1</sup>

Only yesterday morning Giulio came to stay with my mother and me. This morning we were also expecting his friend Bruno Zanobini to join Giulio in living in a small room in our apartment.<sup>2</sup> Toward nine o'clock in the morning Giulio began to worry because his friend had not arrived yet. "We agreed that he would be here early in the morning," he said. "I better go see why he is so late."

When he was gone, I helped my mother, who had sciatica and could not walk by herself, to go to our neighbors' apartment to see what they had left there. As the *Volksdeutsche* they had brought many things from home in Ukraine. There was a small trunk full of bed linens, towels, and tablecloths. The bed had been left unmade and the blankets and the bedspread left behind. Also, there was a suitcase full of summer clothing and women's lingerie. Many small knick-knacks were scattered on the windowsills and in the kitchen.

But most of all, my mother was delighted to see all that they had left in the kitchen. There was a shelf full of jars with preserves and canned food. They had also left some sugar, salt, and flour, and a big box of potatoes. My mother exclaimed, "There is enough food here for about a month or even more." Then she corrected her estimate, "Of course, it will depend on how much the young Italian men eat."

I agreed and added, "We better watch to make sure nobody gets to it before we do."

Giulio returned from the camp alone. He placed a box on the kitchen table that he had brought from the camp and said, "The whole camp is empty, and there is nobody there. It looks as if they all left in a big hurry. Near the camp I encountered one Italian who stayed at his Polish girlfriend's house last night. He told me what he heard had happened. It seems that during the night many armed German soldiers surrounded the camp. All the foreign workers, including the Italians, and all the prisoners of war, the English and the Soviets, were ordered to march out under heavy guard."

Giulio looked at me and said, "I was lucky I brought all my belongings here yesterday; otherwise I would have lost everything."

"Yes," I said, "but the most important thing is that we were lucky you came here yesterday. If you had waited until this morning to come with Bruno, you would now be far away from here and we would never have seen each other again."

Giulio reflected for a few seconds and then said, "No, it was not luck, and it was not by chance that I came here yesterday. I came because I wanted to be with you as soon as possible after your father was gone. I couldn't postpone coming here until this morning because it was very important for me not to leave you alone at such a difficult

time for you." He embraced me and was holding me tight, as if he were afraid that if he let me go I could suddenly disappear. Then he kissed me and joyfully said, "The important thing is that we are together."

"But we were lucky," I insisted, "that the Germans did not evacuate the camp the night before when you were still there and we could have lost each other forever."

Giulio agreed, "Maybe, as you say, that was a one in a million lucky chance, or maybe it was destiny, or maybe both, that helped us to remain together."

My mother interrupted us because she was curious to find out what was in the box Giulio brought and asked him to show it. He opened the box and said, "Look what I found in the barracks of the English prisoners of war." And he pulled out several packages of English tea and a few packages of crackers.

"Uhh!" I said with surprise.

And my mother added, "There is enough tea for us to drink the whole year!"

My mother and I asked Giulio to tell us what he saw going on in the hamlet.

"Everywhere people are looting the abandoned apartments and houses," he said. "It looks as if a lot of people have left the town and the hamlet."

"It will be hard for us to watch our neighbors' apartment, especially during the night," my mother said. "It will be better to move all their belongings in the small room, which you just cleaned up. If the neighbors should return, we can always give it all back." Giulio and I agreed that it was the best thing to do. We moved a bed from the small room to the kitchen for him to sleep on and spent all afternoon moving everything from our neighbors' apartment to ours. Having their keys and their permission, we felt that we did it for safe-keeping, but it was clear that they would never return.

Early the next morning Giulio and I decided to venture out to see if we could find some food in the abandoned apartments and homes. Giulio emptied his military backpack and I took our market bag just in case we found something. In the morning we did not go too far from the workers' hamlet. Most homes that we entered were already cleaned out by the others who came before us. Then in one home where the whole pantry was left empty we found one shelf full of jars with some yellow fruit cut in cubes and preserved in clear syrup.

"Why didn't they take these jars too?" I asked Giulio.

"Maybe they couldn't carry all that was here," he guessed.

"Or maybe they didn't like it. Let's try it," I said.

We opened one jar and to our surprise it was marinated pumpkin that had a very pleasant sour-sweet taste. We ate all the fruit and drank all the juice from the jar. Then we carefully placed some jars in my bag and the rest of the jars in the backpack, which became very heavy for Giulio to carry, so we returned home with our find.

In the afternoon we took the sled with us and ventured farther into town along the canal where there were several abandoned barges still full of black coal. On one of the barges the door of the cabin was wide open. We could see small pieces of white paper scattered on the deck and fluttering like butterflies in the light wind.

Giulio commented, "It was already looted. But let's go in and see if something was left inside. Maybe I could find there some tools."

Inside the cabin the floor was completely covered with small wrinkled pieces of fine white wrapping tissue. It appeared that someone had unwrapped the small packets searching for something useful and not finding anything of interest threw it all on the

floor. I scooped up a handful of the scattered papers and saw all kinds of watch spare parts underneath. I showed them to Giulio, who was looking inside the bench drawers hoping to find some tools.

"This man was a watch repairman," he said. "I found some fine jeweler's tools. Whoever looted here didn't know that they are very expensive. We will take them. However, don't bother to collect the spare watch parts because we would not know what to do with them."

Then Giulio saw a small jeweler's lathe attached to the bench and commented in admiration, "This is a fine little machine that costs a lot. But I would need some heavier tools to remove it from the bench. Let's go home and take the tools that I used to put the sled together." In a hurry we went home. Mama was surprised to see us back so soon. Giulio took the tools and a blanket to wrap the lathe and we walked back to the barge very fast.

Nobody else had come in our absence. Giulio began to busy himself dismounting the lathe and told me to collect some of the unwrapped packets with watch springs and other larger spare parts. "Who knows," he said "we may find some watch repairman who could be interested in them."

I was scooping up the paper on the floor searching for the un-wrapped packets and carefully opening them to see what kind of parts were inside. Once in a while I would show them to Giulio and ask him if he wanted me to take them. Then I carefully un-wrapped one packet containing three smaller packets and was expecting to find some watch parts inside.

"Ah-h-h!" I jumped up holding the packets securely in my hand. "Giulio! Look what I found!" And I showed him a golden ring with a clear yellow stone. "It is a good find!" exclaimed Giulio, inspecting the ring. "Try it on, it looks like it should fit on one of your fin-gers."

He put the ring on my left ring finger and it was just the right size. "Now you have an engagement ring and we are engaged," he said jokingly.

Then he saw that I was holding the other two small packets in my hand and asked. "What else is in there?" I opened my hand and carefully unwrapped one small golden wedding ring and then another larger one. We looked at each other with a pleasant surprise. Giulio shook his head in disbelief and said, "Lost one ring, found three rings."

"What do you mean?" I asked him, puzzled by what sounded to me like a riddle.

"Never mind," he answered. "It is a long story. I will explain it to you later."

With the serious expression on his face Giulio stood silently contemplating and looking at the two wedding rings in my hand. Then he said very slowly as he was reasoning with himself, "One wedding ring for the bride... and another for the groom..."

Suddenly his face lightened up, showing that he had found an answer to his reasoning. Resolutely, he took the smaller wedding ring and looking in my eyes asked solemnly as if he were performing a real wedding ceremony, "Lala, do you want to have Giulio as your husband?"

Although I was surprised to hear it from him at that moment, I thought that it was a marriage proposal and answered, "I do."

Slowly Giulio put the wedding ring on my left ring finger. Then he asked himself, "Giulio, do you want to have Lala as your wife?" And he answered, "I do." And pointing to

the larger wedding ring he extended his left ring finger toward me and said, "Put it on my finger." As I was doing this, I wondered, both rings fit our fingers as if they were made to order.

Giulio joyfully announced, "Now, we are husband and wife before God as our witness." And he concluded, "Amen!"

All smiling, he looked at me and asked, "May I kiss my bride?" And he gave me a long, long kiss, as he was sealing our union forever.

Everything happened so quickly that I couldn't even imagine if Giulio was serious in what he said and did. I was speechless and looked at Giulio wondering if what had happened was not a dream.

"Do you realize," he asked me joyfully, "that we just got married?"

"Did you really mean it?" I asked him with disbelief.

"Of course, I meant it! I love you! And you love me! How else can you explain why we found these three rings?" He asked me, puzzled himself by such a strange coincidence, and added, "Maybe it was pure chance, maybe it was a destiny, or maybe it was the will of God." Then he added an Italian proverb, "*Anche il caso e il volere di Dio.*" And he promptly translated it for me, "A chance is also the will of God."

Giulio looked around the cabin, then he spread his arms and said, "Look around, *mia piccola bimba del'cuor*,<sup>3</sup> with a little bit of imagination it looks like a small chapel prepared for our private wedding ceremony with the floor covered with white carpet of fluttering pieces of tissue paper that resemble flower petals..."

Suddenly the chaos of the looted cabin had transformed itself in our eyes into a romantic chapel. Giulio closed his arms around me and kissed me again and again...

I didn't know yet if I was dreaming or if it was really happening to us. Giulio looked so happy and cheerful that I had to admit to myself that he really believed that the marriage ceremony he performed was genuinely true and joined us together before God.

Out of the cabin's window the rays of the setting sun reminded us that it would be dark soon. Giulio said, "Let's hurry up and go home." He finished quickly removing the lathe from the bench and collected all the auxiliary parts that he could find. We wrapped everything in a blanket and carried it to our sled outside; together we pulled the heavy load on the slippery road toward our apartment.

We were walking fast and it was difficult for us to talk. We both were reflecting on the very strange coincidence of events that happened that afternoon. I was surprised that after the many months that Giulio had been cautious in not giving me any signs of his intentions to ask me to become his wife, suddenly he made a decision in a few moments after I found the rings. I could not understand this unexpected change in his behavior, but I didn't dare ask him about it. I only thought, "Be happy with what happened. Do not interfere with this magic moment by questioning him about his reasons for being cautious before and for being impulsive now. Be patient and wait. When the right time comes he will explain why."

We arrived at our apartment and carried up the heavy find to the second floor and deposited it in the small room that by this time had become our storage room. My mother looked at Giulio's find and asked, "What you will do with it?"

"I don't know yet. But it is a beautiful piece of machinery," answered Giulio and then half-jokingly added, "For now I will just admire it."

"Giulio," I said, "let's show Mama what else we found." And we extended our hands to show her our rings.

"Those are golden wedding rings!" she exclaimed. "Where did you find them?"

"I found them on the floor of the barge," I said. "Giulio decided that, if we found them, it was meant for us to wear them."

My mother looked at us shaking her head. "I hope you know what you are doing in these uncertain times."

"*Oui, Maman*,"<sup>4</sup> we answered together in French. We didn't dare mention to her anything else that happened to us on the barge.

Soon after the supper my mother went to sleep in our room and Giulio and I sat on his bed in the kitchen; we admired our rings and wondered about our find. I was waiting patiently for Giulio to tell me the mystery about his lost ring and maybe to explain his impulsive decision to perform a private marriage ceremony.

I already knew that Giulio was not married and knew something about his mother, father, and brother, with whom he lived. I also knew what schools he attended and what work he was doing before the war. I also knew where he had been during his military service. But I felt that he never felt free to talk about the most personal side of his life—about the girls in his life. And, though I was very curious, I did not pry, hoping that his secrets would not interfere with his affection for me. Now I felt that he was ready to open up and I waited with trepidation, hoping that what he would tell me would not destroy our love for each other. Giulio knew that I was waiting for him to explain the strange riddle about the rings that he said this afternoon.

To my surprise, he began by asking me a very strange question, "Is there a prejudice against illegitimate children in your country?" And without waiting for my answer added, "Would you be prejudiced against somebody who was born out of wedlock?"

"No," I answered promptly, puzzled by such a specific question and added, "Maybe such prejudice existed in Russia in the past, but in my time this has been accepted as a common part of life. It does not make any difference to me how a person was born."

"And how about your mother?" He asked. "Do you think she has such prejudice?"

"No, I am sure she does not. Her sister had a son born out of wedlock. He was very dear to her and I never heard anything from her of prejudice about him or about her sister."

"Good," said Giulio like my answer was very important to him. "You see," he explained, "in Italy this prejudice still exists."

Giulio got up and went to look for something in his baggage and returned with an envelope. He sat next to me, put his arm around my waist, pulled me close to him and said, "Now I will tell you why I said 'Lost one ring, found three rings' this afternoon when you found these rings on the barge. I told you that it was a long story. I never told it to anybody; you are the first one to hear it from me because I don't want to have any secrets from you. Let me collect my thoughts for a while to find the right place to start."

I was all attention and curious and anxious to hear what kind of a secret was connected with the rings.

"You probably wondered," Giulio began to tell me, "why I was for such a long time so correct in my relationship with you. I cared for you but I didn't want to deceive you

and was cautious not to give you false hope about our future. There was a very important reason for it: in Italy I have a fiancée to whom I was engaged for several years. In the summer of 1943, I was in Greece<sup>5</sup> and was waiting for a military leave to go to Italy to get married. At that time gold had to be used by the government to finance the war and it was impossible to buy a golden wedding ring at the jewelers. When my friend Pierin Panzeri was on leave home, he was able to buy a ring from his aunt and he gave it to me as a gift for my wedding.

"My uncle Pietro, my mother's older brother, was in charge of preparing all my documents required by law for the marriage license. Suddenly, I received a letter from my mother in which she wrote that there was a big quarrel between our and my fiancée's families regarding my original birth certificate, which was required for this purpose. In it I was registered by the last name given to me by the nuns at the hospital in Pisa, where I was born to my unwed mother.

This document was a surprise for everybody, including my mother. She believed that by making me adopted by her husband when she got married, she had forever removed from me the stigma of my illegitimate birth, because after I was adopted I was issued a new birth certificate with the last name of my adoptive father, Verro. Since that time this certificate was used for me everywhere, in schools, for work, and in the military service.

My mother kept this secret from me for twenty years until the time I enrolled as a volunteer in the Air Force. Only then she told me that I was born when she was nineteen years old girl and that my real father was a married man from Asciano, a village in Tuscany where my mother lived with her family. As my mother was telling me this story, which was painful for her, I didn't tell her that I knew from the day of her wedding in the village, when I was only four -years old, that the man she was marrying was not my real father. My mother also told me that she made a big sacrifice by not marrying one wealthy man only because he was not willing to adopt me and give me his name. There is so much to tell you about my mother; I shall recount it some other time."

Giulio paused for a while as if trying to remember why he started to tell me this story, "Now, let me tell you how the things are between me and my fiancée."

I was sitting quietly cuddled close to him and listening as he was confiding in me such intimate details about his origins. I felt that he didn't want to have any secrets between us. Now I knew that he was serious about wanting me to be his wife.

"Well," he said looking at the envelope he was holding all that time in his hand, "let me return to the time I was in Greece. First, I received a letter from my mother complaining about the quarrel with my fiancée's family. Shortly after, I received this letter from my fiancée."

Giulio slowly pulled her letter from the envelope and translated to me from Italian the last sentences that she wrote to him, "As a result of the situation that developed regarding your illegitimate birth, my parents don't approve anymore of my marriage to you. At this time all that I can tell you is that our chances of getting married are without hope. And for the future, in my opinion, I doubt that our marriage could be possible. Only if it's God's will, would we get married."

Giulio put the letter back in the envelope and placed it on the bed. Then he gently took my hand between his hands and continued, "Soon after I received these two letters all military leaves were cancelled and we didn't receive any more mail from Italy. And

afterward, all the Italian troops in Greece were deported to Germany as prisoners of war and I ended up in this camp in Laband. Notwithstanding my disappointment about the rejection of my fiancée, I still felt that I gave her my word to marry her and had an obligation to do it if her parents would change their decision on my return after the war. That's why I couldn't promise you anything before."

I was overwhelmed with emotion and wanted to ask him, "And what happened now that you changed your mind?" But I was afraid even to speak those words.

Meanwhile, Giulio continued to tell me the rest of the story. "Here in the camp another strange thing happened. Only my friend Pierin Panzeri knew about the wedding ring that he gave me as a wedding gift. One day I had discovered that the ring had disappeared from the breast pocket of my uniform jacket, where it was very well secured with a safety pin. That's why today when you found the three rings on the barge I said, 'Lost one ring, found three rings.' At that moment it dawned on me that it was indeed 'God's will,' as my fiancée wrote to me, and that it was not her that I was to marry because her wedding ring had mysteriously disappeared.

Giulio embraced me and concluded, "Finding the new wedding rings with you was the sign for me that it was the will of God to marry you. At that moment of revelation I impulsively did what I felt ought to be done, I performed our marriage ceremony with only God as our witness. I have heard that it can be done under the extraordinary circumstances, and our circumstances were indeed extraordinary."

Giulio paused for a while and continued, "Now you understand why I am so sure that it is meant to be that we, you and I, met in this place far from our homes and our countries and that we fell in love with each other. We could call it lucky chance, or call it destiny, or call it the will of God. No matter how we call it, I am glad that it did happen. Today we made a commitment to each other to be husband and wife." Giulio said these words with such emotion by putting in them his heart and soul, as if he suddenly felt free from his vows to his fiancée, which until today were still binding him with an invisible web of obligation to marry her.

Cuddling close to him I said, "I am very happy too, that we met and fell in love and that we are together. But who knows if we could remain together after the Soviets come."

Giulio embraced me reassuringly and kissed gently as if he was opening a happy beginning between him and me. For a while we sat close to each other, silently reflecting on Giulio's logical conclusion to the unexplainable chain of events that happened to us. I felt that by sharing his intimate secrets Giulio wanted us to become closer to each other. I felt that the invisible bond between him and me that we already had for a while suddenly became so strong that it overwhelmed me and I shivered.

"It is becoming cold in here," Giulio said interrupting the silence, and got up to add some coal to the stove.

It was the first time that Giulio told me his secrets but I felt that I needed an answer to one more question that was very important for me to know and asked him, "Did you love your fiancée very much?"

"Well," he said, "now it is very hard to tell. When I proposed to her, I believed that I loved her. But, after she wounded my pride by renouncing our marriage, I reflected a lot about my feelings for her and about her feelings for me. She was not a very young girl, she was of my age, and, if she was really in love with me, she could have disregarded

her parents' religious and moral arguments. But she didn't.

"It could only mean that she didn't love me enough, she was looking only to get married. Of course, it did not help that during most of our courtship and engagement I was away in the Air Force and we saw each other only during my short military leaves. And even then we never had a chance to know each other better. Most of all, I never felt from her that spontaneous warmth that emanates from a person who is in love; when I touched her she behaved as a marble statue who cannot show her emotions.

Her parents, who were devoted Catholics, were very strict and did not allow us to be alone, neither in the home, nor when we were going out; they always sent her younger sister with us when we went out for a walk or to the movies."

He reflected for a few seconds and concluded, "Now it seems that I knew better her sister Rita than her; she was a vivacious young girl always keeping the conversation going and setting the mood for the three of us."

"Then you were not really passionately in love with her?" I asked him.

He looked at me with a smile and said, "She also was not passionately in love with me. She never looked at me with such love in her eyes as I can see in your eyes when you look at me. I am sure that she liked me and considered that I was a good man to have as a husband, until the inconvenient birth certificate appeared."

"You didn't tell me her name," I said.

"Elsa," he replied.

"It's a German name," I commented.

"It is used in Italy too."

Then I dared to ask him, "Was she very pretty?"

"She had very beautiful hair, the color of copper. But what I really didn't like about her was that she used a very heavy makeup, probably to cover up her freckles, which people with red hair usually have. And I remember," he added this with a grimace, "that in those rare moments when we had the chance to be alone for a few minutes and I was able to give her a quick kiss on the cheek, it was very unpleasant to feel the makeup instead of the clean skin of her face."

I was surprised to hear his answers and asked him, "Why did you decide to marry her if there were so many things that you didn't like about her, especially her coldness and her lack of emotions?"

"Well, I always thought that her strict Catholic upbringing didn't allow her to show them before marriage and that she would change after our wedding. I almost valued it as a sign of her purity. And I appreciated many positive sides about her. She was brought up in a good moral family and was serious about marriage. She knew how to keep the house, she was a very good cook, and she was able to sew, even to sew men's pants, and she embroidered well. She was a serious girl and I believed that she could be a good wife and mother to my children."

"Do you have her picture to show me?" I asked.

"I had it, but after receiving this letter when I was in Greece, I ripped it in small pieces and threw it away."

"You were very upset with her then," I commented.

"Of course, I was," he answered quickly.

"Was she your first love?" I inquired further.

"Oh, no!" he answered emphatically. "My real first love was a young Spanish girl

called Margarita. I really had a big crush on her. It happened when I was in Spain.”

“Why didn’t you marry her?” I asked, being surprised that he was so openly enthusiastic about her and was not afraid of making me jealous.

“Well, at that time I was a very young mercenary soldier. I couldn’t bring her to Italy where I didn’t have any job and could not offer her economic security. She was more mature and more practical than I was and when she found out this, she told me straightforward that I had nothing to offer her beside my love. We quarreled. Disappointed and heart-stricken I asked to return to Italy. Shortly after my return home I found a good job with the telephone company and that’s when I met Elsa, who was working as a switchboard operator in a big hospital.”

Our conversation had lost its spontaneity by returning back to his fiancée, about whom Giulio didn’t want to talk anymore, and he gave me a “good night” kiss and told me to go to sleep. I tiptoed in the bedroom trying not to wake up my mother.

It was already after midnight and compared to the previous nights there was an unusual eerie quiet on the streets. The events of that day were overwhelming. I couldn’t collect my thoughts; ideas and facts were jumping in my mind from one to another and I couldn’t fall asleep. Sometimes it seemed that all that happened that day was just a dream and that tomorrow morning it would just disappear in the light of the day.

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1. “They are going, they are going. Where are they going?”
  2. See the chapter “The Prince of My Dreams.”
  3. “Little girl of my heart” - in Italian.
  4. “Yes, Mama.
  5. See the chapter “Italy Allies With Germany.”

## **Part Eleven**

### **In Poland Under Occupation by the Soviet Army**



# The Snapped Rope

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth of January<sup>1</sup> we saw the first Soviet Army soldiers from our windows; they were going from door to door checking the apartments in the hamlet of Laband. There were no civilians daring to go outside—everybody was waiting to see what the Soviet Army's next move would be. My mother said, "Quickly remove your golden wedding rings and hide them." We obeyed, although very reluctantly.

When we heard heavy knocking at the door of the downstairs apartment and then the steps of the soldiers on the stairs, my mother said, "Help me walk to the door to greet the soldiers."

"Good morning, soldiers!" she greeted them cheerfully, trying to conceal her fear. They were not surprised to hear her speak Russian; it seemed that they already knew there were many of their fellow countrymen in the hamlet.

"Good morning, Aunty," they greeted her.

"Tell us who is living here," asked one of them while the other one checked the rooms.

"Me, my daughter, and an Italian prisoner of war," answered my mother. "He escaped from the prisoner of war camp and we gave him refuge. As you can see, I cannot walk well and he is helping us with the heavy chores like bringing the coal from the cellar."

The other soldier interrupted her, "Isn't he a German? Tell him to show us his documents."

Giulio showed him his camp pass saying, "*Lager* pass."

"It's cold outside, soldiers," said my mother to distract them from further examining Giulio. "I have the tea kettle on the stove. Do you want to drink some hot tea?"

"Why not?" said one of them.

"Of course," said the other one.

"Well, sit down here at the table," my mother invited them. I placed two glasses on the table, and poured the hot tea saying, "We don't have any sugar."

"It's all right. We are used to doing without it."

One of the soldiers saw the two packages of tea that were in full view on the shelf and grinned, "Ah-h, Aunty, you drink English tea."

"English prisoners of war were here in the camp," explained my mother. "We got it from them."

Giulio took the two packages of tea from the shelf, gave the open package to my mother, and placed the unopened one in front of the soldiers and said pointing to each, "One for Mama, one for soldiers." It was a smart move because after that they did not think to look to see if we had more tea hidden somewhere else.

As the soldiers were drinking tea, my mother asked them where they were from. They named small hamlets or villages somewhere in Russia that were not known to us. My mother commented, "It is far away in Russia." And they specified the regions, confirming that indeed it was a long way from here.

Then one of the soldiers said, "Well, Aunty, thank you for the tea. We have to go check other apartments."

Before leaving the other one asked, "Where are the people who lived next door? We saw the door open and nobody and nothing is in there."

"They left several days ago. We don't know anything about them," answered my mother.

"And who is living on the first floor? They didn't open the door when we knocked."

"A widow with a small child. They are probably still sleeping," tried to justify my mother.

They believed her because they didn't bother to go there and we saw them going out and across the street to another building.

After those soldiers left, no others came that day. My mother insisted that we, especially Giulio, not go out. Toward late afternoon I convinced her to let me make a quick run to see my aunt and the children.

My aunt said that she had instructed Fredrik to say, if he was asked, that his father was in the Red Army. The little boy, who was not more than nine years old, understood that this lie was necessary to protect them from harm.

While I was away Giulio showed that he was the man of the family. He went in our neighbors' cellar and moved all the wood they had to our cellar. And he said that he probably should also move the coal. After doing that heavy work he went to take a shower and we heard him singing.

When he came out clean and smiling, my mother asked him, "Giulio, how can you sing at such a difficult time?"

"I am happy," he answered. "The Italians sing when they are happy."

After the first inspection of town and the workers' hamlet very few Soviet Army soldiers remained stationed there. During the first couple of weeks of Soviet occupation of Laband most of the soldiers were guarding the strategic points, such as the railroad station and the *Presswerke* factory.

Very ominous rumors spread quickly among the Russians Ukrainians, the *Volksdeutsche*, and other nationalities from the Soviet Union. The rumors were that everyone who was in Germany would be deported to concentration camps in Siberia. They also suggested that getting voluntarily back to the Soviet territory as quickly as possible, before the mass deportation to concentration camps, could be the best solution to avoid being deported.

My mother, heavily limping from the sciatica pain, ventured to visit some of our neighbors. She came back and told Giulio and me, "The people I talked to said that the best route to Ukraine by foot is to go to the town of Czestochowa<sup>2</sup> where there is a checkpoint for those who are returning voluntarily back home."

I sat with my mother on her bed and had a lengthy discussion with her in Russian about the pros and cons of this solution. Giulio, who couldn't understand Russian, was impatiently walking back and forth in the kitchen waiting to hear our decision.

"Mama, you cannot walk." I said. "This was the reason we remained here and didn't go with Papa and Igor. How do you plan to walk now?"

"Well," she explained, "one of our neighbors bought a horse and he agreed to put me on the cart; that is if you feel that you could walk. We will pay him with the things that we found in our neighbor's apartment. We shall put what we can from our stuff on

the small sled, which the man said we could attach with a rope to his cart."

"And what about Giulio?" I asked her anxiously knowing right away that this would separate us from each other. But my mother's self-preservation instinct didn't include preservation of my happiness of being with Giulio.

"It will be his decision what he wants to do," she replied.

"You know what this means?" I asked, "It means that I will lose him forever."

My mother promptly replied, "You will lose him anyway when we are deported to the concentration camps in Siberia."

"But it would not be immediately and we could be happy a few weeks longer." But when my mother made a decision, nothing could convince her to change her mind.

I explained my mother's decision to Giulio. He wondered if it was wise for her to travel in such cold winter sitting on the cart full of the neighbor's belongings.

"How far is this town of Czestochowa anyway?" he asked us.

"We don't know."

"Well," he said, "if you think that this is the best solution for you, I will go with you because you will need help on your way there." Then he asked, "Do you think they will allow me to go with you to the Soviet Union?"

"Do you mean you want to go with us all the way there?" I asked.

"Of course," he replied, "I don't want to leave you! Remember, we are husband and wife."

"Giulio, you are completely unaware of the Soviet paranoia—they consider all foreigners to be spies," I answered him in a definite tone of voice. "They will never allow you to cross the border. And if they did allow it, we would be separated. As a foreigner, they would send you for sure to a different concentration camp from the one where they send us."

"If you are convinced that they will send you to a concentration camp, why are you going now? Wait until they deport you; at least you will be traveling on the train."

His reasoning made lots of sense. And I went back to my mother and tried to convince her that Giulio was right. But she made up her mind that if we returned voluntarily our punishment would not be as severe as if we were deported from here. There was nothing to do but to pack as many of our belongings as we could load on the sled.

We went to say good-bye to my aunt and the children. My aunt was surprised that we had made this decision. She agreed with Giulio. "If they have to send us to concentration camps, let them provide the transportation!"

We told my aunt to send Fredik to our house early the next morning to take our keys so they could have whatever remained in our apartment. We said that we hoped to see them sometimes and somewhere when they also return to the Soviet Union. And we embraced each of them kissing and saying good-bye.

Early in the morning all three of us put on warm clothing. Giulio and I brought our packed luggage down the stairs, and tied it down with rope to the sled. In addition, Giulio and I had backpacks with more stuff and bags with food.

Our neighbor was finishing loading his cart. Giulio secured the sled to the back of the cart with rope and then we helped my mother climb up the cart, where she had to sit very uncomfortably on top of the piled bundles. I covered her with a warm woolen blanket, hoping that she would be able to withstand her sciatica pain. We gave our keys

to Fredrik, who remained to watch our departure.

Finally, the neighbor and his wife got in front of the horse, he took the reins, and the cart slowly moved forward. Giulio and I were walking behind the sled watching to make sure that it didn't turn over. Our sled was bumping on packed snow on the pavement and Giulio had to straighten it from going to the side of the cart. We had hardly progressed a dozen meters from our apartment door as the sled got stuck on a rough spot clear from the snow. The horse made a sharp pull and the rope holding our sled snapped.

"Stop! Stop! Stop!" we both screamed to the neighbor, who reluctantly stopped the horse. Giulio tried to make a knot in the rope close to where it was attached to the cart, but the end was very short and he told me to explain to our neighbor that he had to go in our apartment to get another piece of rope. The neighbor did not want to lose time waiting for us and began to scream that we were only a burden for him.

Without consulting us, Giulio made a sudden decision. He went to the side of the cart where my mother was sitting and ordered her, "*Maman*, get down! We are not going anywhere. This arrangement is not working. After a few meters it could happen again and again. Get down!"

And we helped her to get down from the cart and removed the bundle we gave our neighbor for his service. The neighbor immediately took off and we remained right in the middle of the street with our sled. We could not move the sled and had to unload our luggage and bring it piece by piece upstairs to our apartment.

Exhausted, we sat in our kitchen and Giulio commented, "It was not our destiny to go to Czestochowa. The snapped rope was just a warning sign for us that we should remain here."

My mother, who had sat for only a few minutes on the cart, said, "I don't think I could have resisted sitting in that position for very long. The sciatica was already beginning to hurt me very badly."

"I am glad we are back here," I said to Giulio. "At least we can stay together a little while longer. Who knows, when they will start to deport us back to the Soviet Union?"

Giulio embraced me and concluded, "It seems that we all are glad that our departure to Czestochowa failed."

We unpacked all our luggage and put everything back where it had been before. At the end of the day we were all very tired and after supper Giulio suggested that we go to sleep early. "There is one Italian proverb that says: '*La notte porta il consiglio*.'" And he translated: "The night is the mother of counsel."

The next day there were fewer people leaving for Czestochowa. But my mother observed from her place near the kitchen window that people were hurrying somewhere with empty sleds and carts. "*Ils vont, ils vont. Ou il vont?*"<sup>3</sup> she was asking. "Giulio, Lyalya come here. They probably found something somewhere..."

"Do you want us to go and see where they are going?" asked Giulio.

My mother hesitated to answer. On one side, she did not want to lose an opportunity to get what the others were going to get, maybe some food; on the other side, she was scared to let us go and maybe face some danger from the Soviet soldiers.

Well, Giulio made a decision, "Lala, get dressed. We are going to see where these people are going."

We took our sled and followed the others. They led us to the far end of the railroad yard where many freight cars were parked; some were open and empty and some were locked. We stopped and observed what was going on.

Two women with a cart carrying a sack full of something were coming in our direction. Giulio told me to ask them what it was and where they got it. We waited for them and I asked them in German. Before answering me the younger woman translated my question to the older one in Russian.

"Ah-h, you speak Russian," I said.

The older one asked, "Are you Russian too?"

"I am from Ukraine," I answered, "and he is my friend, an Italian prisoner of war."

"Well, if you go behind those cisterns," the older woman gestured in that direction, "there are several freight cars loaded with bags of sugar."

"But be careful," warned the younger one, "there is one very young Soviet soldier guarding it. If you speak to him in Russian, like we did, he will speak to you. I think he is lonely and does not mind exchanging a few words in Russian. He just might give you one bag like he gave us."

"*Spasibo, spasibo*<sup>4</sup> for your advice," I thanked them in Russian. I translated to Giulio what they said and he agreed to try our luck.

We went toward the cisterns. As we passed them we saw several freight cars. The door of one car was open and the Soviet soldier with the gun across his shoulder was leaning against the side of the door; behind him was a car full of bags with sugar.

"Stop!" he gave us a warning. We stopped.

"Soldier," I said in Russian, "my Russian friends told me that we may find some sugar here. I couldn't carry it alone and asked this Italian prisoner of war to help me."

"Are you Russian? Where are you from?" the soldier asked.

"I am from the Donbass region of Ukraine."

"Ah, I know where it is. I am from Kursk," he answered and with his hand gave a sign to come closer.

We came to the car door and I continued the friendly conversation with him, "It is a long way from home for both of us."

"Sure it is," he replied. Then asked, "Have you been here long?"

"More than two years and we don't know how long we have to stay before we can go home. Nobody gives us any food. With the sugar we could barter for other foods while we are waiting to be sent home."

The soldier grabbed one bag and pushed it toward the door.

"Here, catch it," he said to Giulio, who could barely keep it from falling on the snow. I helped him put it on the sled.

"*Spasibo, spasibo!*" I said sincerely to the young soldier and added, "I hope that you return home safely."

The soldier waved his hand dismissing us, "Go! Go! Before somebody sees that I gave you the sugar."

Giulio pulled the sled and said, "I hope that the rope will not snap again. You better help by pushing the sled on the rough spots."

My mother couldn't believe that we were so lucky to get a whole bag of sugar. The next day we took my aunt some sugar and she gave us some potato starch that she was able to barter with her neighbors for something else. She was glad that the children

could have sugar to supplement their diet.

Every day, more and more Soviet soldiers were appearing in town. They were searching the apartments looking for food and alcohol. One day, two of them knocked at our door and arrogantly rushed right into the kitchen.

My mother, who was sitting there, greeted them in Russian and asked them to sit down. Hearing that she spoke in their native tongue they changed their aggressive approach.

They sat down at the table and one of them said, "Aunty, do you have some salt? We need it for our field kitchen."

My mother said to me, "Lyalya, bring in the whole bag of salt that we have; we will share it with these soldiers."

I went to the small room and brought the bag with salt, which was about five kilograms. When I put the bag on the table, my mother told me, "Take a bowl and fill it with salt for us and give the rest to the soldiers for their kitchen."

It was a smart decision because the soldiers had what they asked for and had no reason to search for it. This meant that the whole bag of sugar hidden in that room was safe. They even said "*Spasibo*" to us and left quickly.

Giulio and I took the advice of my mother and didn't venture out for a couple of days. Giulio found something to do by moving the coal from our neighbors' cellar to ours. The cold winter was still ahead and it was wise to have a good supply of fuel. After several hours of hard work he returned from the cellar all covered with black dust. He was singing while taking a shower and was very hungry at a mealtime. My mother was not used to feeding a young healthy man and she was concerned that our provisions were disappearing fast.

Then the potatoes that we found at our neighbors' apartment began to spoil and my mother decided to use the bad ones to make potato starch. We discarded the rotten parts and ground the good parts on a meat grinder that we borrowed from my aunt. We placed the ground mash in containers with lots of water, allowing the starch to deposit on the bottom. Then we removed the fiber, which being lighter remained on top, and slowly scooped out the water, leaving the rest of the water to evaporate. To use all that starch my aunt gave us a recipe for delicious starch cookies that were friable without much flour or fat. This enterprise kept us busy for almost a week.

Giulio worked with us and accompanied his work by softly singing Italian songs, of which he had an inexhaustible repertoire. He had a nice, harmonious voice and I liked to hear him sing. But my mother was constantly reminding him, "How can you sing at such a difficult time?" Especially, when he was singing in the morning, she would tell him a well known Russian proverb: "*Rano ptashechka sapyela, kak by coshechka nye s'yela.*" Which means: "The little bird began to sing too early; beware not to be eaten by the cat."

Giulio was answering her with a smile, "*Maman*, I am happy. I sing when I am happy."

Now that Giulio was living with us we had lots of time together. Mornings, days, evenings, and nights were filled with discovering new things about each other. We spoke only in French, which I mastered very quickly, and we were able to talk in a more refined and concise language. During the long winter evenings Giulio was reading aloud the French version of "The Thousand and One Nights", a luxury edition of the book with

beautiful illustrations. It was a book that our neighbors left behind when they fled from the Soviets.

When on the fourteenth of January 1945 we celebrated my twenty-second birthday, Giulio gave me as a gift his white woolen undershirt that was standard winter underwear in the Italian Air Force. And I found myself a useful hobby. I unraveled the yarn, washed it, and began to knit myself a pullover with a shell design from instructions given me by my aunt. I was eager to show Giulio my skills because he told me that his mother was an experienced knitter and made very fine items. Having lots of free time I finished the pullover quickly and was rewarded by Giulio's praise for an excellent job.

We also had plenty of time to recount stories to each other about our families and ourselves. Although Giulio already knew much about my life, there still were many things that he wanted to know. Usually we talked about my family in the evening after supper when my mother also had a chance to participate.

After my mother went to bed, Giulio felt more at ease telling me many things about himself and his family. I was fascinated, listening night after night as he narrated his story - like chapters in a book about his life and his adventures. I was discovering how and where he grew up, who his parents were, what kind of childhood he had, what schools he attended, why he went as a volunteer into the Italian Air Force, what he did in a Legionary Air Force in Spain, where he was and what he did during this war that was still going on, and how it happened that he became a prisoner of war in Germany.<sup>5</sup>

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1. See the chapters "Chance, Destiny, or the Will of God" and "The Prince of My Dreams."

2. A town in Poland about 70 kilometers northeast of Laband.

3. "They are going... They are going... Where are they going?" [in French].

4. "Thank you, thank you" [in Russian].

5. See the chapters "The Village of Asciano," "Dea Egeria," "Giulio Is Growing Up," "Volunteer in The Italian Air Force," "Italy Allies With Germany," and "Italian Armistice."

## The NKVD Camp In Laband

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and Giulio Verro

In the first weeks of February 1945 rumors spread quickly that the infamous Soviet NKVD<sup>1</sup> had arrived at the workers' hamlet of Laband and taken over the now empty *Kriegsgefangenenlager*,<sup>2</sup> the barracks where previously were housed the English and Russian prisoners of war, the former Italian prisoners of war, whose status was later changed to foreign workers, and the rest of the camp where single foreign workers from European countries lived. The NKVD also took over several adjacent apartment buildings, in which they established the offices, a cafeteria and living quarters for the officers and guards; they also encircled the whole complex with additional barbed wire.

This event put in a state of alarm the inhabitants of the hamlet: families from the Soviet Union—the *Volksdeutsche* and the specialist foreign workers, the latter category to which my family belonged; and families from eastern part of Poland and Baltic States annexed by Stalin before WW II. All these families believed that the NKVD was preparing

the camp for processing Soviet citizens. With great fear and anxiety they expected that very soon they would be deported to the concentration camps in the remote regions of the Soviet Union.

One evening during that week, after my mother went to sleep, Giulio and I were in the kitchen sitting on his bed and talking about these unconfirmed but widely believed rumors. Trying not to allow my voice to sound heavy with sadness I told him, "My dear Giulio, there is not much time left for us to be together. Our happiness will end very soon. Let's make the best of these final days, making them unforgettable for the rest of our lives."

"I shall be delighted to make these days unforgettable," Giulio agreed putting his arm around my waist and squeezing me close to his body, "but not because they are our last days together." And he reassured me, "I don't intend to leave you. If you are deported, I shall go with you. I have always wanted to know more about the Soviet Union. This will be the right time to find out if what I have heard so far about it is true."

"My dearest," I replied to his naive notion about the ease of being admitted to the so-called workers' paradise, "you still don't understand the communist's paranoia about foreigners who are all considered to be spies of capitalist world." And I repeated what I said to him before, "Believe me, they would never allow you to go with us. And, if they did, they certainly wouldn't allow us to be together; they would put you in the concentration camp for spies, and me and my mother in a camp for those whom they call 'collaborators' because we were in Germany during the war."

"We shall see if you are right," replied Giulio, unconvinced by my reasoning. "In Italian there is one proverb very appropriate for this case; '*Non fasciarti la testa prima che è rotta*.'" And he translated, "Don't bandage your head before it is broken." Giulio playfully touched my forehead like he was inspecting it and said, "It is not broken yet."

He smiled and embraced me, holding tightly as if trying to show me that he would not let go of me. I was not smiling and to cheer me up he said, "Now, Lala, if you want us to have this evening filled with happiness, remove that sad expression from your face. I will sing you a serenade to cheer you up, "*O, campagnola bella, to sei la Reginella*..."<sup>3</sup>

Giulio's optimism was contagious and he was able to put me in a good mood and make me forget my sad thoughts. His love and his gentle caresses filled that evening with unforgettable happiness.

In the following days, everybody in the hamlet observed the work progress in the Soviet NKVD camp with trepidation. To everybody's surprise, the NKVD agents didn't pay any attention to the Soviet citizens at that time. Instead, with great speed they began to fill the barracks in the camp with German civilian men, whom they had rounded up on the streets and taken from their homes. From the number of men brought to the camp, this operation seemed to be conducted on a large scale, with German men being taken from the neighboring towns and villages and probably from the whole region of *Oberschlesia* and beyond.

In broad daylight the armed NKVD guards led the German men through the streets of Laband like the herds of sheep, through the gates and into the camp. It was surprising to see those men, who only a few weeks before had proudly displayed their superiority over the workers of other nationalities, looking and behaving exactly like the *Ostarbaitern* and the prisoners of war when they were led by armed German guards.

Like them, now the German men walked with curved backs and heads bent down. Like them, they walked slowly, many dragging their feet after a long march from their hometowns. Like them, once in a while one of the men deprived of cigarettes would pick up a cigarette butt from the ground; it was probably discarded by the Soviet soldier, a foreign worker, or a local Polish citizen.

Suddenly the roles were reversed and the German men experienced what it meant to be conquered and to be at the mercy of the occupying enemy army. Only the local Polish population was glad to see the Germans pay the price for the German government's arrogance in annexing Polish land. Most of the Soviet citizens living in the hamlet felt sympathy for the captured German men because they knew what awaited them in captivity and because it was only a matter of time before they would also be led into that camp.

One morning during that week my mother was sitting near the kitchen window, as it was her habit when she was having sciatica pain, and watched what was happening on our street. I was cleaning the bedroom, and Giulio was adding coal to the stove. Suddenly I heard my mother calling me with fear in her voice, "Lyalya, Lyalya! Come here quickly. There are Fredik and Nanochka<sup>4</sup> coming here with two Soviet officers! Go and open the door for them."

Fear made my heart beat so fast that it seemed as if it would jump out of my chest. I opened the door before the officers had a chance to knock and saluted them, "Good morning! Come in, come in, please." I invited them to the kitchen.

One of the officers very politely introduced himself, "I am Captain Komov." And then the other officer, who seemed to be of higher rank, also introduced himself. My mother introduced all three of us, "I am Antonina Gavriylovna Gladkaya.<sup>5</sup> This is my daughter Olga, and this is Giulio Verro, an Italian prisoner of war and my daughter's..."

I promptly added, "My husband."

The officers politely shook hands with the three of us. My mother invited them to sit down at the kitchen table and offered them a cup of tea, as she usually did with all military visitors.

This invitation had worked well with all other uninvited visitors and always provided a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere. She used it consciously, as a defensive move, rather than as a happy hostess who wanted to please her guests. This time it worked again in her favor; the officers accepted the invitation.

While the teakettle was warming up and I was setting the table, Captain Komov began to explain why the children brought them to see us. "We went this morning to the apartments where most of the *Volksdeutsche* live, hoping to find interpreters who were able to speak, read, and write both German and Russian. To our surprise we found only one woman with such qualifications. Then your sister-in-law told us that you and your daughter are the right people for whom we are searching, and she told her children to accompany us to your apartment. Now, tell us if you indeed can speak, write, and read both German and Russian."

My mother answered, "Yes, we can."

"What did you do before the war?" inquired Captain Komov.

"I was a teacher for more than twenty years," my mother said proudly. "I taught Russian language and literature and sometimes also German language."

And I said, "I was a student in the Moscow Power Institute and studied German

language for six years.”

“Well, it sounds good to me,” concluded Captain Komov, looking at the other officer.

As though he did not anticipate any objections, the higher-ranking officer ordered us, “You are both drafted as interpreters at the NKVD camp for as long as we shall need you. You will be working under Captain’s Komov’s supervision and he will explain to you in detail what will be expected from you.”

Captain Komov informed us right away, “You may sometimes work long hours, and sometimes in the evenings. You will not be paid for your work, but you will be provided with the same food rations that all our servicemen are receiving.”

I was anxious about leaving Giulio and asked, “Could we remain living here in this apartment?”

Captain Komov smiled and reassured me, “Of course, of course, you may live here with your husband.”

The two officers got up without finishing their tea and before leaving Captain Komov added, “Come tomorrow morning at eight o’clock to the camp’s main gate near the one-story brick house and tell the guard that you have come to see Captain Komov. They will let you through and tell you where to find me.”

The two officers again politely shook hands with the three of us and left.

Because all the conversation was in Russian and all happened so quickly, he couldn’t figure out what it was all about, we had to explain it to Giulio in French.

Mama asked him, “Have you recognized that they were NKVD officers? But they didn’t inquire anything about Papa, or why we happened to be here in Germany. They just ordered us to work for them without any inquiry into our past.”

“Can you imagine,” I asked Giulio, “that we will actually be working for the NKVD?! It is so scary, like working in the lion’s den.”

My mother was still concerned that we could be interrogated later to check our political background and said to me, “We have to agree what we shall tell them, in case they ask us about your father.”

“Well,” I suggested, “we have to tell them very simply without too many details, the same thing that Antonina Yulyevna and children tell about Igor, ‘Papa was taken by the first Soviet troops that came through the town of Laband: two soldiers came in the apartment and ordered him to go with them.’”

“All right, no other details,” said my mother. “We don’t want to contradict ourselves and get into trouble.”

I agreed, “It’s better not to volunteer any information.”

Giulio said to my mother, “You were worrying that we didn’t find much food when we were searching the abandoned homes. Now you will be provided with food by the least expected source, the infamous NKVD!”

I added, “For as long as they need us.”

The next morning, before we left for work, Giulio retrieved the engagement and wedding rings from the hidden place, put them on my left ring-finger, and said very seriously, “From now on you should wear them all the time to let everybody know that you are married. It will protect me from losing you to some young NKVD agent.”

“Giulio,” I reproached him, “how can you even think such a thing? I love you!”

“I know,” he said. “But it is safer when the others know this too.” Then he

explained that he would hide his wedding ring for now to protect it from being taken by an unexpected Soviet soldier who might come during the day looking for loot. Before leaving we taught him a few Russian words that could be helpful to him in dealing with uninvited Red Army visitors.

"Don't you worry," he said, "I know very well how to invite them to have a cup of tea." He kissed me and before we left he wished us both good luck.

When we arrived at the camp gate, we met another woman who would be working with us. We had never met her before in the hamlet or at work. She was very cautious in giving us information about herself, telling us only that her name was Zhenya, that she was a *Volksdeutsche* and lived in the hamlet with her mother and her three children, and that she was literate and fluent in both German and Russian. Neither she nor my mother mentioned anything about their husbands.

Captain Komov directed us first to the camp's security office, where we were given passes for the camp with the NKVD seal. When we returned, Captain Komov took charge of our training right away. He explained that our work was to register the German men who were brought to the camp. We were ordered to follow the precise procedure—no deviation.

First, we had to ask each man to show us his documents, from which we could find the exact information about him so we could write it in Russian. Second, we had to register each man by his name, address, and occupation. There were three lists to which the man could be allocated. To do that, we and the men were instructed to speak clearly and loudly so the other men waiting silently in line would hear—giving them a chance to correct that information in case the man had provided a false answer. The questions had to be asked in the following prescribed order:

"Were you ever a member of the Nazi Party?"<sup>6</sup>

"Have you ever served in the SS,<sup>7</sup> or in the Gestapo?"<sup>8</sup>

"Have you been an officer in any branch of the German military?"

All those men who belonged to any of these infamous organizations, no matter what else they were, had to be registered on the First List that Captain Komov informally named as "The Fascists List."

Those who didn't belong to these organizations had to be allocated to one of the two other lists according to their occupation or the work they were qualified to do.

On the Second List, he named as "The Laborers List," had to be registered all those who declared themselves to be students, teachers, white-collar workers, office employees, bankers, merchants, artists, farmers, and all kinds of unskilled laborers.

On the Third List, he named "The Specialists List," had to be registered engineers, scientists, technicians, medical doctors, other medical personnel, all kinds of skilled and trained workers in the various trades, such as electricians, bricklayers, carpenters, mechanics, miners, machine operators, and metallurgical workers.

Occasionally we had to consult with Captain Komov in his office about some occupation and on which list we had to register a man. However, it became clear to us right away that the men were selected for work on the various projects to reconstruct the Soviet cities and industry after the ravages of war.

In the beginning, before the first echelon of deportees had departed from Laband, the German men suspected, but didn't know for sure, why they were put in the NKVD camp and what their captors intended to do with them. Most of them assumed that they

would be sent to do some kind of work on the local or regional reconstruction projects in their own country. Probably some of them guessed that they would be deported to the Soviet Union as civilian prisoners of war.

There was rarely a chance for the men to ask us questions because there was always a low ranking NKVD officer in the room who supervised them and us. Besides, we were not allowed to engage in conversations with the detainees.

One day I had to register two young men who spoke German with strong French accents. It just happened that at that moment the NKVD officer was not in the room. I asked them in French if they were Frenchmen, which they confirmed.

"Why are you here then?" I asked. "Why don't you request to be released if you are not German?"

"We did ask when they brought us here and we were told that we should complain with the authorities when we arrived at the next checkpoint."

"Do you want me to talk to the Captain?" I offered.

"No." They both answered promptly.

"We were already told that they are not releasing anybody from this camp," said one.

"We will do as we were told," added the other.

I dared to tell them, "The sooner you do it, the better chance for you to be released."

The young Frenchmen showed signs of being annoyed with my suggestions and one of them repeated stubbornly, "We were told to complain at another checkpoint."

It was clear that they didn't trust me and didn't believe me. "Do you want to give me the addresses of your relatives in France?" I asked them. "When the war ends, I would write to them and notify them what happened to you."

"There is no need for it," said the one who was more stubborn than the other. "We are sure that this misunderstanding of our nationality will be cleared up at the next checkpoint and we will be released."

I was sorry that they were so naive. Moreover, they insisted on being registered as students, which, they didn't know and I couldn't tell them, meant they would be sent to work as laborers on the heavy projects. I tried to help, but it was their choice. At the end of the day I told Captain Komov that there were two Frenchmen among the Germans.

His answer was simple but convincing to justify their presence in this group. "Probably, they are Germans from the Alsace-Lorraine<sup>9</sup> region," he said, "otherwise they would not be here. Anyway, we don't release anybody from this camp for security reasons."

His answer was very clear in my mind, "This NKVD operation had to remain secret for as long as possible. The released men would go home and talk."

This was as much as I could do to help them. I didn't see them anymore, but sometimes I thought about what had happened to them.

As Captain Komov promised, we were under his direct supervision and he treated us with utmost respect. As we were promised, we were receiving two hot meals every day. At lunchtime and for supper we could eat in the camp cafeteria, or we were allowed to bring home a large piece of dark bread and a flask full of soup made with chunks of fat pork meat and potatoes. It was enough for all three of us. After several years of poor

diet we began to fatten up. And we had so much bread that we were giving some to my aunt for my little cousins; later she taught us how to make *kvass*, a Russian homemade sour-sweet drink made from dry bread, yeast, and sugar.

Giulio was staying in the apartment and did all the housekeeping chores. Occasionally he had to deal with the Soviet soldiers who came to the apartments in search of alcohol or other loot. He usually offered them a cup of tea, which some of them accepted. But most of them were asking for alcohol. One day Giulio almost jokingly offered one soldier a small bottle of *Eau de Cologne* that we found in our neighbors' apartment. He said to him that this was the only alcohol he had. To his surprise the soldier opened the bottle, took a sip from it, and left the apartment happy with his find.

To keep Giulio safe from these unexpected visitors, we taught him to say in Russian: "*Moya zhená sekretar v NKVD Lagerye*," which means: "My wife is a secretary in the NKVD camp." This helped him on several occasions with some more aggressive soldiers. But as time passed, there were fewer and fewer transient Soviet troops and unexpected visitors were becoming rare.

In the NKVD camp we met the doctor's assistant, Zina, who arrived there first and was taking care of a dispensary while waiting for the doctor to arrive. Since most of her patients were German men, she often needed our assistance in translating their complaints and in communicating with them. She became very friendly with us and came often to visit us in our apartment.

She was a very pleasant, cheerful, and talkative woman in her middle twenties. Her round face was accentuated by puffy rosy cheeks, a turned-up short nose, and smiling fleshy lips. Her head was attached so close to her short, robust, and plump body that only the military collar of her uniform was able to define her neck.

She complained that she hadn't seen her husband since they were both drafted and assigned to different military units. "I rarely receive letters from him. Probably, I will divorce him after the war because I barely remember him. During the war I met a very nice doctor with whom I worked for a long time and we fell in love. We write to each other often and I hope to marry him after returning home."

Zina liked Giulio and told me that I was lucky to find such a fine young man. She gave me advice, "Try your best to make him happy; don't lose him." She presented herself as an expert in marriage, although she hadn't lived with her husband for several years. She counseled me to stay attractive and to make our apartment more attractive, "Cover all those boxes with some fabric, even with bed sheets if you don't have anything else. It will make them look like little tables. Rearrange the items in the room once in a while, and make some curtains for the windows. Men appreciate comfort and they like to live in a pleasant looking place."

I remember one funny thing about Zina that she confided in me. "I don't wear any underwear! Not even panties because I need ventilation under this heavy uniform." I couldn't keep from telling this to Giulio, who couldn't believe that she was so hot even during the winter. And we laughed with him every time he told me jokingly about Zina's need for ventilation.

In the middle of February, or maybe a little bit earlier, new chief, *Podpolkovnik*<sup>10</sup> Kozhevnikov, arrived at the NKVD camp; everybody called him simply *Podpolkovnik*. Right from the first days of his arrival in the camp, he met my mother and me at our

workplace. He treated us with respect and never asked us any questions about why we were in Germany or anything about our political past.

With *Podpolkovnik* a long awaited doctor for the dispensary also arrived. Her name was Lyudmila Larionovna<sup>11</sup> and she was *Podpolkovnik's* mistress. They both were transferred from the same NKVD unit stationed somewhere near Berlin. It became known much later that their NKVD unit was involved in some kind of a scandal connected to the ransacking of a German bank and to the disappearance of a large amount of gold coins.

*Podpolkovnik* was a tall, solidly built man in his fifties. He maintained a dignified posture and kept his head high, giving him an air of self-confidence, dignity, and superiority reflecting not only his rank but also his personality. He was an educated and well-mannered man and he appreciated these traits in other people.

He made the habit of coming once in a while to our apartment to talk with my mother, Giulio, and me. He liked to have conversations of a cultural nature, where he was able to show off his knowledge of literature, art, and music. He respected my mother, with whom he talked about the works of classical Russian poets, writers, and playwrights, surprisingly not about contemporary Soviet writers.

With Giulio, with my help in translating, he had conversations about Italian painters, sculptors, and, of course, about Italian operas. Sometimes Giulio, who had a very pleasant voice and knew many arias from popular and famous Italian operas, was singing some passages for him. This common cultural interest established a mutual respect between *Podpolkovnik* and us, especially with Giulio and my mother.

He never spoke about politics, never asked us about our reasons for being in Germany, or about my father, and we didn't volunteer this information. However, he asked Giulio to tell him about how he became a prisoner of war in Germany.

*Podpolkovnik* also encouraged his mistress, Lyudmila Larionovna, to spend her free time with us. She told my mother, "*Podpolkovnik* always complains that the education I received at the medical institute was limited to medical science. He told me that it is good for me to be in the company of educated persons like you, Antonina Gavriylovna, from whom I can learn things that I missed in my education in school and in the institute."

As she was saying this, I thought, but didn't tell her, that maybe he also wanted her to spend her free time with us for another very personal reason—to keep her from being too much in the company of the younger NKVD officers, whom he probably felt to be potential rivals considering his, hers, and their age.

Lyudmila Larionovna was a very attractive young woman in her late twenties. She was drafted during the war as a doctor before finishing her internship in a hospital by speeding up her graduation from the medical institute. She had blond hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, and very fine facial features of the northern Russian type. She had a tall, slim figure that was accentuated by a well-fitted uniform, a tight skirt and a jacket. She was not as sophisticated as *Podpolkovnik*, but she had a good cheerful personality and got along well with people.

After she became more familiar with us, she confided that she met *Podpolkovnik* on her first assignment and since then he was able to transfer her anywhere he was transferred to. Although he was married, he had promised to divorce his wife and to marry her after the war when they returned home. She genuinely believed him.

Toward the end of February another high-ranking officer, *Polkovnik*<sup>12</sup> Stepanov, arrived, and under his command the camp began to fill up quickly with newly captured German men, whom we had to register in a hurry, as if there was some kind of a deadline to be met. The three of us were working from eight o'clock in the morning, going home for about one hour for lunch, and on our return working until seven in the evening. In addition, we were kept several times during the week to work until midnight.

I remember one episode well that happened on February 23, 1945, on the day of my mother's fiftieth birthday. The camp at that time was filled to its capacity and new men were still arriving. Although the final destination and the day of departure had been kept secret, somehow it became known to the captured men that they would soon be deported to the Soviet Union. Therefore, on that day *Polkovnik* Stepanov gave an order to keep the detainees locked up all day in their barracks, and a large number of guards with guns were posted along the barbwire fence. Security that night was also very strict because it was expected that some men might try to escape during the night.

Captain Komov asked Zhenya and me to work late that night to register those men who were brought to the camp that day late in the afternoon. It was not the first time that we had to work at night, but this time all of them had to be processed in a hurry to be included with the rest of the captured German men in the first group scheduled to depart very early the next morning.

My mother was allowed to go home on time because she was the oldest. Before leaving she told me, "I will bake the birthday cake. Please return home as soon as you finish. We will wait for you to celebrate my birthday."

When Zhenya and I finished registering the last man, we hurried up to go home. But the door of the building was locked and the guard told us, "It's *Polkovnik* Stepanov's order not to let any man out of the camp tonight. You have to remain in the building until tomorrow morning."

We both became very upset. I was concerned that my mother and Giulio were waiting for me to celebrate my mother's birthday and would worry if I didn't return home. Zhenya had three children who were home with her elderly mother. She was worrying that they would be afraid not knowing what happened to their mother and would cry if she didn't return home.

Since we couldn't go home, we went to have something to eat in the cafeteria that was in the same building. We sat at a table close to the one where Captain Komov was eating. I was so upset that I couldn't touch my food and began to cry, and Zhenya was comforting me.

Captain Komov came to our table and asked, "What happened? Why are you crying?"

We told him that the guard told us that there was a curfew and we had to stay in the building until tomorrow morning. I begged him, "I have to go home tonight. I cannot stay here." And I explained, "Today is my mother's fiftieth birthday and she and Giulio are waiting for me to celebrate it. I am afraid if I don't come home, Giulio will come to the camp to look for me and he could be shot because of the curfew." Zhenya explained that her children would be afraid and would cry if she didn't come home.

Captain Komov apologetically said, "I know that there is a curfew tonight. But I was not informed that you have to remain here all night." And he added with indignation,

"How it is possible not to allow the employees to return home at night without warning them ahead of time?" Then he told us, "All right, let's finish our supper. I will take care of it. Olga, stop crying. You will go home for such an important occasion. And you, Zhenya, stop worrying. Your children will have their mother home tonight."

When we finished eating Captain Komov told us, "Come with me." He ordered the guard at the door to let us go out with him and led us to the back gate, the one that was the closest to the street leading to our apartments.

It was a very dark cloudy night and as we approached the gate the guard called, "Stop! Who is there? The password!" We stopped.

"I am Captain Komov. Do you know me?" he asked.

The guard didn't answer and Captain continued, "I just finished my work in the office. I don't know the password yet. I need to let my interpreters go home. They live only a few buildings away from this gate."

The guard replied, "There is a curfew tonight. It is *Polkovnik* Stepanov's order not to let any man leave the camp."

"I know that," calmly replied Captain Komov. "But they are not men, they are women and they have to go home. I am taking full responsibility for this and ordering you to let them go through the gate."

The guard hesitated for a few seconds, then ordered, "Approach slowly." As we came closer, he shined the flashlight in Captain's Komov face and checked the insignia of his rank. Reassured that he was his superior, he shined the light in our faces to ascertain that we were indeed women, and only then agreed to let us go through the gate.

"Be careful," Captain Komov warned us. "Stop if there is a guard outside. I will wait for a few minutes here at the gate, just in case. Good night."

"Good night, Captain Komov," we answered. "Thank you!" And we walked quickly but cautiously, being afraid to encounter another guard. We got safely to our apartment, and I took a deep breath and said "Good night" to Zhenya, who lived farther on in a *Volksdeutsche* apartment building.

I was right; Giulio was almost ready to go out to look for me. Luckily, my mother, who was always cautious and afraid of everything, kept him from leaving. The three of us celebrated my mother's fiftieth birthday and Giulio wished her many more birthdays together with us.

That evening we were very grateful to Captain Komov for being so kind to us. We explained to Giulio what Captain Komov had told us about himself: that he was not an NKVD agent, but a high-ranking bureaucrat with expertise in labor allocation in the People's Commissariat of Industry and Labor,<sup>13</sup> and that he was assigned temporarily to the NKVD for this particular operation of allocating the de-ported German men according to specific categories to various parts of the Soviet Union for the reconstruction of the cities and industry.

The next morning when we came to work, the camp was empty. The captured men had been transported to the railroad station and loaded into freight cars during the night; the infamous operation was done under the cover of darkness. In the camp only those German men who performed some work in the camp were left. Among them I saw Kiklas, a young man who had worked before with Giulio in the telephone workshop at the *Presswerke*.

Kiklas told me, "I was lucky to know where to find at the *Presswerke* all the electrical and telephone supplies they needed for the camp. And they kept me to work here as an electrician and a telephone maintenance repairman. I don't know how long I will be able to stay here, but the longer, the better. If they need me, maybe they will not send me to the Soviet Union."

"The same with us," I said. "We were drafted to work for NKVD. Our hope is the same as yours, the longer, the better."

He asked me about Giulio and Bruno. I told him that Bruno had been evacuated by the Germans with the rest of the camp, but that Giulio was in my apartment that night and had remained with me. Kiklas said, "Giulio is a very good young man. All of us at the telephone workshop respected him and Bruno. Say hello to Giulio from me. And tell him that Kramer, who worked with us in the workshop, was killed in the last days before the Soviet Army occupied Laband. He was in the civil defense unit operating a machine gun on the roof of one of the *Presswerke* buildings." And he concluded, "Maybe it was better than being deported to the Soviet Union."

The men that remained in the camp were busy cleaning the barracks, preparing them for the next wave of German men who were expected to be brought in from other parts of the country occupied by the Soviets for processing. We found ourselves temporarily without work.

Captain Komov told my mother and me that after the misunderstanding the night before, he talked to *Polkovnik* Stepanov, who ordered him to move us to the empty apartment in a two- apartment house located very close to the main gate of the NKVD camp. "It might happen many times that one or both of you have to work late at night," explained Captain Komov. "This way you don't have to go home so far from the camp." He told us that we could have two or three days off for moving and settling down in the new place.

I went home to call Giulio and the three of us went right away to see the apartment. We met the family that lived in the other half of the house. They were allowed to live so close to the NKVD camp because Monsieur Izhorski was an interpreter for the Soviet Army unit stationed in the town of Laband.

We met his wife, mother-in-law, an eighteen-year-old daughter Aileen, and a small son Bernard, who was about five years old. They were Polish by nationality, but they had lived a long time in France and were naturalized French citizens. For some unknown reason they had returned to Poland during the war.

They all spoke French and Polish at home, but Monsieur Izhorski also spoke very well German and learned quickly to speak reasonably well in Russian. His young son Bernard spoke both Polish and French well and, amazingly for his age, he had learned German during the war and learned Russian in a very short time when the Soviet Army occupied Laband. Monsieur Izhorski used a bicycle for getting around the town and many times took his son with him. When we met the Izhorski family, they were very pleased to have us as their neighbors, especially since my mother, Giulio, and I spoke French.

We inspected the new apartment, which had a large kitchen, bathroom with a shower, and two large rooms, all furnished. Giulio made a decision and told me, "This shall be your mother's bedroom, and that one, ours. Don't you agree that it is time we have our own bedroom?"

I agreed, although I knew that my mother would have preferred that I share a bedroom with her. But by now we presented Giulio to everybody as my husband and it was natural for us to have our own bedroom.

As we moved to the new apartment, Giulio put on his wedding ring, which before he had kept hidden for fear that the Soviet Army soldiers would take it from him. "Now it is safe to wear it," he explained. "I hope that living close to the NKVD camp gate there will be no unexpected visits by transient soldiers." He was convinced that wearing wedding rings was sufficient evidence for others that we were married. For us it was a symbol confirming that in his and my heart and mind we really were married.

After the several days that Captain Komov gave us to move to the new apartment, we resumed our work in the NKVD camp. Giulio had a big job ahead moving the coal from the basement of the old apartment to the one in the new apartment with the small sled. It took him couple of weeks of hard work, but it needed to be done. After all, the month of March was very cold and no one knew how long we might be living in Laband. It was better to be sure to have enough fuel.

Our living in the apartment so close to the NKVD camp gate made it much easier for *Polkovnik* Stepanov, *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov, Captain Komov, Doctor Lyudmila Larionovna, and the doctor's assistant, Zina, to come any time for social visits, especially during the long evening hours and on those days when we and they had less work in the camp. It gave them a chance to get away from the military atmosphere and feel relaxed in a home environment. It felt like they adopted the three of us, my mother, Giulio, and me, as their extended family where they could forget their duties and their rank for a while and just to be themselves.

Captain Komov didn't have as much free time to visit us as the others because he was the busiest of them all. He was responsible for all the paperwork involved in selecting and assigning the captured German men to the various labor categories and projects. My mother and I had more contact with him every day in the camp's office. He never made his military rank of captain more important than being a human being, the man named Komov. He knew that he could rely on us to perform well our work. We knew that we could expect understanding and just treatment from him. And this led to mutual respect between us.

For the doctor's assistant, Zina, and for Doctor Lyudmila Larionovna we were the only easily accessible women with whom they could safely talk about themselves and their female interests, which they couldn't share with men. They shared some of their intimate thoughts with us about their relationships with the men in their lives, and about their plans for the future.

Zina treated me, like a younger cousin; she liked to give me her advice and suggestions on how to make Giulio happy. She never stayed for long in our apartment. She would come and go, rarely sitting down, mostly walking from one room to another and talking all the time. She made, however, an exception to accept a cup of tea from Giulio because she enjoyed his gentle manners and the attention he was giving her in serving tea. She asked me once, "Are all Italians so polite and respectful with women, or is it Giulio who has such pleasant a personality?"

Lyudmila Larionovna never came with Zina—one of them had to stay in the camp's dispensary. She was coming to visit us more in the early evening and many times came together with *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov, who encouraged his mistress to

spend much of her free time with my mother, as he was saying, “to upgrade her cultural knowledge and manners.”

*Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov found us to be listeners with whom he could share and also show-off his cultural knowledge, which he valued probably more than his rank as an NKVD officer. When he came to visit us with his mistress, she had to listen to his discussions either with my mother on Russian literature, or to the exchange of ideas with Giulio on Italian art and opera. On those occasions I observed Lyudmila Larionovna as she sat near him silently admiring her lover’s erudite discussions. But one could easily see that she was very conscious of her inability to participate in such conversations.

One day when she was alone with my mother, she asked her, “Do you think, Antonina Gavriylovna, that I could learn all that he wants me to know, so I will not make a bad impression in his circle of friends and colleagues?”

My mother told her, “Of course, my dear, but you should do a lot of reading on those subjects. They are not more difficult than medical science, which you mastered well.”

After she got to know us better, she shared some details about her relationship with *Podpolkovnik* and about her aspirations for their future.

*Polkovnik* Stepanov liked to come for short visits to us, mostly during the days when we didn’t have to work, or in the early evening. He always liked to have a drink of Russian *kvass*, which he told us, “Reminded me of my home.” He had a less complicated personality than *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov and talked mostly about practical things concerning everyday life. He was more interested than the others in how Giulio and I, being citizens of two different countries, would solve our problem of remaining together in that very complicated period of history; it was a time when the lives and destiny of human beings had no value and all was subjugated to the despotic rulers, to the aberrations of political ideology, and to the strict rules of wartime.

He was treating Giulio and me almost in a fatherly manner and looked with benevolent eyes on us, the two young people in love. However, he was also concerned about my mother and told me more than once, “Don’t abandon your mother. She might be useful to you in the future.”

Giulio was very surprised that all our previous fears of the NKVD had been much exaggerated. He told me, “Why were you so afraid of the NKVD agents? Look what nice people they are. It is very strange that all these NKVD officers have never asked you anything, or interrogated you about your past, what you did during the war, or about why you happen to be in Germany, or what happened to your father.”

I answered him, “I am very surprised with this too. But there must be some logical explanation. Either they found out all this information from other sources, or they didn’t want to know anything about it, as long as we were serving their needs as interpreters in the NKVD camp. Or because their assignment at that time was to round up as many of the German men as possible and send them to the Soviet Union; it didn’t include us, the Soviet citizens.”

Giulio commented, “No matter what it is, they treat you with respect and make you feel at ease, and they enjoy and appreciate your company.”

“It is true,” I answered. “But it all could change tomorrow. If they received an order to deport all Soviet citizens back home, they would do their duty as diligently as

they are doing it now with the German men.”

“Maybe,” answered Giulio, “but if you are right, I don’t want to witness it unless they allow me to go with you.”

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1. NKVD - acronym for *Narodnyy Kommisariat Vnutrennikh Dyer* [in Russian] - People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs.
2. Prisoner of war camp [in German]. See chapter “*Presswerke Laband*.”
3. “Oh, the pretty country girl, you are the beauty queen...” [in Italian].
4. My cousins, children of my uncle Igor.
5. Russian custom and spelling of the first name, patrimonial name, and feminine last name.
6. Contraction of party name *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* [in German] - National Socialist German Workers’ Party, or the German Nazi Party.
7. SS – acronym for *Schutzstaffel* [in German] - Black Shirts German Nazi Elite Guard.
8. Gestapo - acronym for *Geheime Staatspolizei* [in German] - the German Secret State Police under Nazi regime, operating against political opposition.
9. A region in northeastern France seized by Germany in 1871 and during WW II.
10. Lieutenant-Colonel.
11. Last name could not be recalled.
12. Colonel.
13. Not sure about the exact name of the Commissariat.

## It's Wonderful News!

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

One morning, in March 1945 as I got up from the bed, I felt nauseated and ran to the bathroom where Giulio, who always got up before me, was shaving.

“What did I have last night for supper?” I asked him. “I feel like I need to throw up.”

Giulio put the razor on the sink and, without saying a word, embraced me and with the soap on his face gave me a long tender kiss. Holding me tight with his face close to mine he looked inquisitively in my eyes and cheerfully announced, “It’s wonderful news! Didn’t you guess it yet? My dear Lala, we are going to have a baby! It had to be expected; we have been playing the husband-and-wife game for a while.”

At that moment my stomach felt really bad and I could squeeze out only a weak smile and say, “I am very, very happy too, my dearest Giulio. At least a part of you will stay with me, if we don’t have a chance to remain together.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” he admonished me sternly. And then with self-confidence added, “This baby will have both mother and father!”

“I wish I could be as optimistic as you are,” I replied. “But having your child is the best thing that could have happened to me, no matter how the future will be.”

“So far everything is going well,” he said in a positive tone of voice. “Let’s not spoil our happiness with such sad thoughts.”

Giulio paused for a while as if reminiscing about something and said, “I already told you that from the time I was growing up I always liked small children. I loved to play with Fiorina<sup>1</sup> and Iella,<sup>2</sup> my two little cousins. Then, during the time I was in the Air Force, I heard some of my married comrades complaining that they had childless marriages. I

never could imagine myself being married and not having children. It would have been a big tragedy for me. Now, at least I know that I don't have to worry that this could happen to me, and I owe it to you, my dearest Lala."

When we told the news to my mother, she commented, "I asked you if you knew what you were doing. Now you have responsibility for a new life."

"Yes, Mama," we replied.

But, as usual, she found something to worry about right away. "Lyalya, you have to see the doctor and check your heart," she told me. "You remember, after you had scarlet fever the doctor diagnosed you with a myocardia complication."

"Mama," I reproached her, "I was seven years old when I had scarlet fever. Since then I never had any problems with my heart."

"Yes, you always had shortness of breath when you ran."

Giulio interfered in our discussion and suggested that, regardless if this condition existed or not, it was a good idea to go and check my health with the doctor.

That week I went to see doctor Lyudmila Larionovna in the dispensary of the NKVD camp and asked her to check my heart.

"What is the matter with your heart? Does Giulio give you some trouble?" she joked.

"Oh, no!" I replied emphatically. "I really need to know about my heart condition. You see, in my childhood I had scarlet fever and as an after effect of that illness the doctors diagnosed a myocardial complication. The only problem with it was shortness of breath when I ran, walked up a hill or up stairs."

"What happened that you decided to check it now?" she wondered.

"I need to know if this could somehow interfere with childbirth."

"Ah! You are pregnant!" she exclaimed. "Congratulations! How long have you known about it?"

"Only this week, when I started to have nausea in the morning."

"Then you have a long way to wait." She listened to my heart very thoroughly and also examined my lungs and concluded, "I don't see any problems that could interfere with the pregnancy or with the childbirth. You look very healthy to me. If you should have any problems, come and see me. By the way, you may sometimes during pregnancy have the problem of constipation. If this happens eat a lot of boiled potatoes."

"Thank you, thank you, doctor," I said with joy in my voice. "I have to go right away and tell the good news to Giulio and to my mother."

Now Giulio and I considered seriously that it was not enough for him and me to wear the wedding rings and to believe ourselves to be married.<sup>3</sup> It was maybe enough to show it to others, but for all legal purposes, for the civil and military authorities, a marriage certificate issued by the lawful institution was required. Now we needed to be legally married.

I asked Captain Komov to have one morning free. The first place we went to officially register our marriage was Laband's Town Hall now under the Polish government. There we found out that they had the authority to conduct official business only for Polish citizens. The employee told us that they had received an order issued by the Soviet Army authorities prohibiting them from registering marriages between Soviet citizens and persons of any other nationality. He further explained, "In order to register your marriage you have to obtain an official written permission for marriage from the

Soviet authorities."

"Where are these Soviet authorities?" we asked him.

"You have to go to the neighboring town of Gliwice,<sup>4</sup> where you can find out if it can be done there."

"Before going all the way to another town," Giulio suggested, "we should try first to see if the priest of the local Catholic church could marry us. A church marriage certificate should be as valid as one from the Town Hall. We have plenty of time to do it this morning." And we went right away to the Catholic church.

It was a very little church built on a top of a small but steep hill, which made it look much taller. A brick sidewalk led to it. By the time we reached its doors, I was short of breath. "Your mother was right," said Giulio. "If we were not walking arm-in-arm, you would have had to stop and rest."

Inside the church we found the priest, an old, short, and skinny man. We saluted him, "*Guten Morgen*,"<sup>5</sup> Father!"

"*Guten Morgen!*" he answered and gave us an inquiring look recognizing that we were not from his parish.

"We came to ask you to marry us," I told him in German.

"Of course, my children," he answered without hesitation and asked, "Are you Catholics?"

"He is an Italian, and he is a Catholic," I replied. "I was baptized as a Russian Orthodox, but it doesn't matter to me in what church I get married."

"A-a-h," said the Father slowly, as he was thinking what he can answer. "I would be very happy to marry you, but I cannot give you a marriage certificate because the Soviet authorities issued an order prohibiting marriages between Soviet citizens and persons of any other nationality."

"What good will it do if we cannot have a document that we are married?" I asked the priest. "If for some reason we would be separated," I pointed to Giulio, "his whole life will be messed up. As a Catholic he could not get married anymore in the church."

"All I could offer you, my children," the priest consoled us, "are my blessings for having good intentions in coming to the House of the Lord to get married." He raised his frail trembling hand and said, "God bless you and protect you. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

"Amen," Giulio said crossing himself.

"Amen." I repeated after him also crossing myself with the Orthodox cross.

There was nothing else to say and the three of us slowly walked out of the church. The priest accompanied us half-way down on the brick sidewalk, where he stopped and saluted us, "*Auf Wiedersehen*,"<sup>6</sup> my children!"

"*Auf Wiedersehen*, Father!" we answered and slowly walked down the path. At the bottom of the hill we stopped and looked back at the little church. It was a clear and bright sunny morning and the priest's figure in the black robe was clearly seen against the blue sky. He was still standing on the sidewalk looking at us and his hand was raised.

"Is he waving good-bye, or is he still giving us his blessings?" I asked Giulio.

"We will never know," he answered. "But the old priest was sincere in blessing us in the church. Let's hope that his blessings will help us in our search to remain together."

Giulio and I decided to wait until warmer weather before venturing to Gliwice to

look for the Soviet authorities that, we were hoping, could give us a permit for marriage.

Meanwhile Giulio found out that several Italian comrades were coming to the local tavern to hear and exchange news. Most of them had remained with their Polish girlfriends in Laband or in the neighboring villages and towns. One of them had been Cosso, an interpreter in the Italian prisoners of war camp. "It was his luck to be in his Polish girlfriend's house on the night the Germans evacuated the whole camp," Giulio commented. "He treated his fellow Italians so badly during the time they were prisoners of war that he could not safely return to Italy. There were too many men who could bring him to justice. He found himself a Polish girl and got married so he could stay in Poland. They had no problems in getting married."

The other Italians heard that in the town of Gliwice there was a place where all foreigners could register for eventual repatriation to their homelands. "Well," Giulio said, "maybe I should go there to register, just in case we cannot obtain permission to go together to the Soviet Union. It is better to keep all options open. Maybe it would be easier to obtain permission to go together to Italy."

I was surprised to hear this because it was the first time that Giulio had mentioned taking me to Italy. Until that time he was thinking only of going with us to the Soviet Union.

"What about my mother?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "We shall think about it when the time comes."

The spring arrived almost unexpectedly with warm days and good weather. As the snow melted, I discovered a flowerbed under the windows of our apartment. Instead of flowers I planted a few pea seeds, which germinated quickly and I was hoping to have a good crop. Giulio saw the bounty of dandelions budding everywhere on the grassy patches and he and I went to collect the young tender plants. He introduced us to the bitter tasting salad from raw and cooked greens. I liked it, but it didn't have much success with my mother. One day the doctor Lyudmila Larionovna came to visit us when Giulio was preparing the dandelion salad; she tasted it and found it to be delicious and healthy.

Now she was visiting us often because the number of German men brought to the camp had diminished considerably and she took care mostly of the enlisted military men. We also worked only when the new groups of German men were brought in. This gave Giulio and me time to do many things together.

My mother and I discovered sorrel on the grassy patches; it is a sour green herb that is commonly used in Ukraine to make a soup. We collected it with Giulio and he liked our Ukrainian specialty very much.

I found a recipe for a soup with the young snow green pea pods. When the peas began to fill in the pods I decided to make a surprise for Giulio and, one day when he went to collect the edible spring flowers and herbs, I quickly put the water in the pot with a few potatoes cut in cubes. Then I collected the young green pea pods and cut them in small pieces, as was instructed in the recipe, added them in the pot, and fried some chopped onions as a condiment. Voila, the soup was ready to eat when Giulio returned home.

All satisfied with my culinary skills, I poured the soup in the dishes expecting compliments. But the first spoon revealed a disaster. The pods' skin was hard and stringy and we had to spit the fiber out. When we read the recipe with Giulio, he laughed

and said that it called for “green snow pea pods,” which are another kind of a pea plant with tender pods. But I didn’t know that such peas even existed. Giulio forgave me and said, “You will learn; I will teach you how to cook.”

From my aunt Antonina Yulyevna we found out that many *Volksdeutsche* were going to the forest to collect mushrooms. Well, Giulio and I went to collect them too. We had two large bags and found some mushrooms that I knew were edible. Then we came to a grassy clearing that was completely covered with light-brown mushrooms on skinny stems, which I didn’t know. We decided that we would collect them and put them in a pile and take some to show somebody who knew them. If they were edible, we would return to pick up the rest of them. They happened not only to be edible, but also according to my aunt’s neighbor, were especially good to marinate. We rushed back into the forest to the clearing, but to our surprise, the pile of mushrooms had disappeared; somebody had taken them all. Only a few broken pieces remained on the ground. We were very disappointed and had to be content with what we had collected before.

My aunt also told us that her neighbors were going to the neighboring villages with whatever they had—clothes, shoes, and knickknacks—to barter for any kind of food. Giulio and I decided to also go into the villages to see what we could find. My mother selected some women’s clothes that we got from our next-door neighbors who left us the keys to their apartment. And one day when I was free from work in the NKVD camp we went to the villages. We didn’t have much luck. We were trying to find some eggs and chickens, but all that the peasants were offering us were potatoes or big turnips.

Finally, one peasant woman liked a dress we had and offered to barter it for a young skinny rooster. I said to Giulio, “We have plenty of dry bread leftovers, we can fatten him up.” So we returned home with the rooster. My mother took charge of feeding him and kept him in the basement. But he was a nervous bird and every morning woke us and our neighbors with his high pitched cock-a-doodle-doo. This prompted my mother to cook him sooner, before he grew to his full size.

On those days that my mother and I were working in the NKVD camp, Giulio took over the food preparation. He often went to the forest to collect mushrooms or edible flowers, such as violets and dandelions, and herbs for *minestra di erbette*, as he called an Italian soup made from spring herbs, which tasted and smelled deliciously refreshing. And when the mushrooms he found were not sufficient to fry, Giulio prepared a tasty sauce to pour over boiled potatoes.

One day, when we returned home from work, we found Giulio very upset. He told us that he had gone to the forest and found a dead elderly couple lying next to each other in the bushes. They looked like they had been shot and fallen together on the ground while holding each other’s hands.

My mother and I made an assumption right away that the Soviet soldiers were now searching for German men hiding in the forest. We begged Giulio not to venture in the forest any more. But Giulio rejected our idea, believing that it probably was a case of local revenge, or just plain robbery that could have been committed without fear of being caught in those unsettled times. However, he vaguely promised not to go there in the near future.

Sometime later after this incident we finished our work in the NKVD camp sooner than usual and came home very early in the afternoon. Giulio was not home and I thought that he had gone into town at the Laband’s tavern to hear the news about

repatriation from his Italian comrades. He usually didn't stay there very long since most of his comrades lived in other towns or villages and had to walk several miles to be back before it was dark. Walking on the open road at night was not very safe, although there was no declared curfew by the occupying Soviet authorities.

After several hours passed and Giulio didn't return, both my mother and I began to worry about what could have happened to him. I went to our neighbors to find out if *Madame* Izhorsky knew where he had gone. But she was able only to tell me that he had left shortly after we went back to the camp after lunch. This made me worry even more, for he had been absent from home much longer than I had estimated before.

"What could have happened to him?" I was asking my mother. And we both were guessing the worst scenarios, "Probably he was picked up to be deported as a German and brought to the NKVD camp here."

"Well," I reasoned, "then it would not be very difficult to have him released because everybody knows him as my husband and as an Italian."

As the time passed by, our speculations about what could have happened to him were becoming more ominous. Even *Madame* Izhorski began to worry and came over several times to suggest that her husband as an interpreter for the Soviet military authorities in Laband could find out if they knew anything about him. And she added cautiously, "This is just in case Giulio has disappeared."

I was sitting near the window, from which I could see the whole street, and after hearing her words began to cry. Then Zina came and asked what happened.

"Maybe," she suggested, "if Giulio does not return before dark, you should go to see Captain Komov and ask his advice."

At that moment I saw at the far end of the street a familiar figure walking very fast toward our house. I jumped up screaming, "He is here! Giulio is here!" And I ran outside toward him. I was so overwhelmed with joy to see him that I continued to cry from happiness.

A few feet before I reached him, Giulio stopped and extended a big bunch of white daisies toward me. "Look, Lala, what I found for you! Aren't they beautiful?"

I took the flowers and embraced Giulio right there in the middle of the street. My mother, Zina, and *Madame* Izhorski were standing outside the house waiting to hear where Giulio had been all this time.

"What happened?" he asked. "Why are you crying?"

"Because I am happy to see you. I was worrying about what happened to you. Where have you been all day long?" I asked him through the tears.

"In the forest," he answered innocently. And then he continued to describe the beauty of nature, all enchanted with his excursion to the forest, "You remember that clearing where we collected those mushrooms and someone took them? Well, it was a sea of white daisies today. I wished that you were there with me to admire it. I couldn't stop collecting them for you."

As we came close to the house, my mother asked him in an anxious voice, "Where have you been all this time? We didn't know what to think about what happened to you."

"I was in the forest collecting these flowers for Lala," he repeated it now as if he was justifying his actions. He looked at all the women standing there and asked with annoyance in his voice, "What is the matter with all of you? Why are you all so upset?"

"Do you realize how long you have been out?" I asked. "We came home right after you left. It was more than five hours that you were gone. I thought we agreed that you would not go in the forest anymore after you found that dead couple there."

Zina was standing by and I told her in Russian, "Could you imagine that this '*durnoy*' man was putting himself in danger collecting flowers for me!"

Then I looked at Giulio and shaking my head in a sign of disapproval repeated to him, "Giulio, you are '*durnoy*', '*durnoy*' young man, to take such risk for a bunch of flowers!"

"The bunch of flowers for the girl I love!" he corrected me. Then I saw Giulio suddenly become very upset and he asked me bitterly showing that he was offended, "Are you telling me that I am '*durak*'? I know that it means 'stupid.'"

"No, Giulio, no!" I tried to embrace him, but he pushed me away. "No, no, these two words do not mean the same thing. Please, Giulio, listen to me. '*Durnoy*' in Russian is used to mean 'naughty' in a playful way. It means one who does something without thinking much about. It is not used in an offensive way like the word '*durak*' would be used."

Giulio was not convinced with my explanation and all upset walked out of the house. We saw him pacing nervously back and forth on the sidewalk. Zina could not figure out why Giulio got upset because we had spoken in French. I told her, "It is our first quarrel since we met each other."

Zina comforted me as an expert in resolving marital quarrels, "Don't you worry, tonight in bed he shall forgive you everything."

I was very upset with my inability to convince Giulio that I didn't mean to offend him and that it had resulted from a difficulty to explain in French to an Italian the meaning of the two very similar sounding Russian words.

It was becoming dark outside. I set the table for supper and placed a jar with the bunch of daisies in the middle of the table. Then I dared to go out and call Giulio to come in to eat. The cool evening air and brisk walk calmed him down. I took Giulio's hand and led him inside.

Conversation at the table was somewhat tense and both of us were trying to find something to talk about that was remote from what had happened that afternoon. My mother attempted several times to remind Giulio not to venture to the forest anymore, but I would not allow her to continue the topic further. I was not sure, if he finally accepted my explanation of the semantic difference in those two Russian words. It was not until we went to bed and Giulio gave me his goodnight kiss and invited me to cuddle close to him in our narrow bed that I knew our first quarrel was finally over.

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1. Daughter of Mario Cortopassi. See "Franchini's Family Tree."

2. Daughter of Dina and Enrico Macchi. See "Franchini's Family Tree."

3. See chapters "The Prince of My Dreams" and "Chance, Destiny, or the Will of God."

4. The German name for the town is Gleiwitz; it is located in the region of Oberschlesia that was annexed to Germany during WW II and became Polish again with the Polish name Gliwice when the Germans retreated from the Soviet Army.

5. "Good morning!" [in German].

6. "Good-bye" [in German].

# Giulio's Watch

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

The spring finally was in full control and the warm weather was here to stay. Giulio and I decided that it was time for us to go to the town of Gleiwitz<sup>1</sup> to see if we could find the Soviet authorities that could give us authorization to get married.<sup>2</sup> Giulio also wanted to get registered with the Polish Red Cross for repatriation as an Italian ex-prisoner of war. He felt that we should try all available options, just in case one of them would not work.

We got up very early in the morning to have a good start because there was no public transportation yet from Laband<sup>3</sup> to Gleiwitz. We had to walk probably more than four or five kilometers each way<sup>4</sup> and we took the shortest route on an unpaved country road that wound up through open fields on gently rolling hills.

Some fields were already green with the new crops pushing through the soil in parallel rows. Some fields were still dark, freshly plowed, and emanating the pungent smell of raw earth. And some fields were uncultivated and covered with wild grass and field flowers that filled the air with the sweet smell of nectar and a buzzing concert of the busy bees. In the distance, far from the road, we could see some isolated farmhouses and farmers tilling the soil.

Giulio and I walked arm-in-arm feeling the closeness of each other's young bodies and our hearts and souls that were in full harmony with the awakening of nature that surrounded us. We felt immensely happy, oblivious to the problems that we could encounter in our desire to remain together forever.

Giulio was walking at a quick pace and to keep up with him I needed the support of his arm. Once in a while I would ask him to stop to take a rest and I would sit on a road marker stone placed at the edge of the road and he would sit on the grass.

We hardly noticed when we arrived at the outskirts of a town. Giulio looked at his Longines<sup>5</sup> watch, which he valued so much that he didn't even consider bartering it for food when he was hungry in the prisoner of war camp.

"We made it in record time," he said. "I had estimated that it would probably take us more than two hours to get here."

With some help from the local people, we found the way to the center of town where we could find all the offices of the Polish Town Government and probably those of the Occupational Soviet Army.

On the Central Square of the town Giulio spotted a group of men dressed in Italian military uniforms. As he approached them, they greeted him with boisterous cheers. He asked if they knew anything about the repatriation and they told him that he should go to the neighboring town of Katowitz<sup>6</sup> to the Office of the Polish Red Cross where all of them had already registered. They didn't know when the repatriation would take place, but because there was no means to communicate to everybody when it would occur, they suggested that Giulio visit that office once in a while and keep in touch with the other Italians.

Then we went to the Town Hall to find out if there were some Soviet authorities in town who could issue us an authorization for marriage. Several Polish employees

gathered to give us their advice.

"You can inquire at the Soviet Army Headquarters in town," one of them told us.

"It is very unlikely that they have the authority to do this," another employee said, "because they are concerned only with military matters."

"You absolutely shouldn't get involved with the Soviet military authority," the third one agreed with the second and warned, "You never know how they will react to such request."

"I agree with most of what my colleagues have told you," said the fourth employee, who was patiently listening to the others, "but I advise you to go to Warsaw where there is already Soviet Consulate, which deals with civilian matters of Soviet citizens. There, someone might have the authority to issue such documents."

"He is right."

"That's the place to go!"

"Yes," agreed the others.

Giulio and I also agreed that his advice was the most logical and practical for us to follow. We expressed our gratitude to all of them for their help and they wished us "Good luck."

When we left the Town Hall, Giulio again joined the group of his fellow Italians. From them he learned that they were making their living by buying, selling, or bartering all kinds of stuff at the big market where one could find food and all kinds of merchandise. The market was in the neighboring large town of Katowitz, which could be reached by the streetcar from Gleiwitz; they explained where to take that streetcar in town. In saluting them, Giulio promised to see them soon at the market. Because I didn't understand anything the Italians had told him, Giulio translated to me in French what it was all about.

We left the town of Gleiwitz in a good mood, feeling that even we didn't find the place where we could get an authorization for marriage; we had received good advice that we might find it in Warsaw. We had plenty to discuss—all the possibilities of how we could arrange our trip to the Polish capital. We also found out where the Polish Red Cross was located to register Giulio, which provided us an alternative if we could not go to the Soviet Union together. Giulio liked the idea of going to the market in Katowitz to barter or sell the stuff that we had from our next-door neighbor's apartment.

We were walking arm-in-arm cheerfully talking and sharing with each other the many ideas that were popping in our minds and we didn't even notice when we were almost halfway to Laband. As we were climbing up a hill on the winding country road, Giulio said, "I can feel that you have been short of breath for some time. This morning you rested sitting on the road marker stone and I sat on the grass on the top of the next hill." He looked at his watch and said, "It is not too late, the sun is still high. We could rest in the same place again."

As we reached the top of the hill the sun was straight in front of us, blinding our eyes and making it hard to see far ahead. Giulio stopped and gave me a kiss saying, "This is a reward for reaching the highest point that we had to climb. From here the road is mostly downhill." I squeezed my eyes and used the palm of my hand to protect them from the sunrays. Shielding the sun I was searching for the road marker stone on which I had rested that morning.

The flat top of the hill was very large, with a slight slope on the other side. There,

against the background of the sunlit sky, I saw two Soviet Army soldiers, one standing with a gun across his shoulder and the other sitting on the road marker stone holding the gun upright in front of him.

"Giulio," I warned him, "slow down. Look ahead. Do you see those Soviet soldiers there?"

Giulio protected his eyes from the sun and looked in that direction. "Yes. I see them. Are you afraid of them? You can speak Russian. Until now the soldiers have not done any harm to you or to me."

"Yes," I replied, "but we never encountered them in the middle of nowhere with nobody else around." I freed my arm from his arm and added, "I am scared. We better not walk so cozy close to each other."

"Try to act natural and don't show them that you are afraid of them," he suggested.

"What are they doing there?" I asked.

"Maybe they are resting like we intended to do," he said.

At that time we reached the curve on the road from which we could see the slope of the hill on the left of the two Soviet soldiers. Sitting and lying on the grass in all kinds of resting positions was a group of about twenty-five to thirty men, and from a distance it looked like they were dressed in civilian clothing.

"Giulio," I said, "those are German men whom those soldiers are probably bringing to the NKVD camp in Laband."

"It seems that you may be right," he replied.

"I should have brought my NKVD camp pass with me," I said with regret. "It would have been helpful to me now."

As we were walking toward them, we could see that both soldiers were watching us. Then, as we came closer, the soldier who was sitting on the stone got up and stepped out on the road holding his gun in front of him and blocking the road, as if he wanted us to stop.

Giulio said to me, "Walk, walk normally. Don't stop now. When we are close enough that they can hear us, salute them in Russian. If they ask about me, tell them that I had to register with the Red Cross as an Italian ex-prisoner of war for the repatriation and that you came as my interpreter."

When we were about four or five meters from the soldiers, the one that was standing on the road gave us a command, "Documents!"

As we slowly approached him, I greeted them in Russian, "*Dobry dyen*,<sup>7</sup> soldiers!"

"Documents!" he commanded without answering my greeting.

When I came close to him, I could smell alcohol on his breath. "Uh-oh, I thought, this soldier is drunk."

I opened my purse, pulled out my Soviet passport and handed it to him saying, "I am an interpreter. I was accompanying this Italian man who was a prisoner of war..."

The soldier interrupted me, "A-a-h, you are R-r-ussian!" And he emitted a string of swearing, calling me all kinds of bad names. "Wa-alk-ing arm-in-arm with a for-r-eigner! Kissing him! Our R-r-ussian boys are not good enough for you!"

"I am an interpreter," I protested. "He is an Italian prisoner of war. He had to register at the Red Cross in Gleiwitz." Giulio was holding his Italian Air Force Identification Card in his hand and I was pointing to it and repeating, "He is an Italian

prisoner of war."

The drunken soldier swore again and said to me defiantly, "We don't need you. We have our own in-ter-r-pr-reter." He turned toward the group of Germans and called, "Hey, Fritz, come here!" The man in a worn-out German uniform got up and was coming toward us.

Meanwhile, the soldier told me, "We will do our own questioning of this man." He handed back my passport and commanded, "Get away from here! March, march!"

"I will wait for him," I replied.

The soldier became angry and raised his gun, threatening to hit me with it and screamed, "Go away! Go away!"

Giulio gently pushed me toward the road and surprisingly calmly said to me in French, "Go, go. Wait for me at the bottom of the hill."

I began to walk slowly, turning my head once in a while. On a large curve on the road I stopped and turned to see what the soldier was doing with Giulio. I saw instead that the soldier was still watching me and, seeing that I stopped, he fired the gun in my direction. Lucky for me, he was drunk and completely out of target.

Although I got scared, I resumed walking at the same slow pace as before. And I thought, "Either he is trying to scare me and shooting in the air, or he is drunk and cannot shoot straight." I walked a dozen meters and stopped again.

As soon as I turned to look back, I heard one bullet hit the marker-stone on my right, bounce from it, and land somewhere behind me. The second bullet went into the grass and the impact spattered clods of earth and grass in all directions. The third bullet hit the marker-stone ahead of me again and bounced back passing so close to me that I got really scared. "He is really aiming at me!" I thought and began to walk faster until I was sure that I was out of his sight. Only then did I slow down.

After walking almost to the bottom of the hill, I sat on the marker-stone and decided to wait there to see if the soldier would release Giulio, or if they would take him with the Germans wherever they are bringing them. I thought, "It is possible that they are taking them to the NKVD camp in Laband, where all officers know Giulio well. That is the best thing that could happen to him because I am sure that Polkovnik Stepanov would release him."

Then I imagined the worst scenario. "What would happen to him if the soldiers are taking those Germans somewhere else? I was so concentrated on talking to the soldier that I did not notice if all captured Germans wore civilian clothing, or if some wore military uniforms. Maybe they are prisoners of war and they are bringing them to another camp where the Soviet Army and not the NKVD are in charge. They would never let him go from there and he might just end up being deported with the Germans to reconstruct the Soviet Union and I would lose him forever." I began to cry.

Through the tears I was looking up the hill and hoping that Giulio would appear on the road. I was watching and waiting and lost my perception of time; it seemed to me to be an eternity. My hope to see Giulio free was disappearing with every minute of waiting.

Then I saw two women coming down the road. I thought, "They should have seen what happened there." As they came close to me, I got up and asked, "Did you see on top of the hill the Soviet soldiers questioning a young man?"

"We were so scared because we heard the shots, and we walked so fast that we

didn't even look at them," said one woman.

"They probably shot him!" said the other one. And they walked away in a hurry.

A panic took over me and I could not think straight what I should do. Like in a trance, I followed the women on the road toward Laband. Slowly I regained some control of myself and decided to wait until the whole group of Germans led by the Soviet soldiers came down the hill. I thought, "They cannot just walk across the fields," and reassured myself, "they must come down this road. At the outskirts of Laband I would hide somewhere and wait as they passed by... I need to hide because if that drunken soldier sees me, for sure he will shoot at me again."

Once in a while I was looking back on the road to see if the Soviet soldiers with the captured Germans were coming down the hill. I was afraid to see them before I reached the first house where I could hide. I began to run, thinking, "I better ask people in one of those houses if they would let me stay with them until the soldiers go by."

When I got to the first house, I knocked at the door but nobody answered. At the second house an elderly woman opened the door. I was out of breath from running and was breathing heavily as I tried to speak to her in German, "Please...There are Soviet soldiers bringing captured German men. I am afraid that they captured my fiancé. Could you allow me to wait in your home until they go by?"

The woman called her husband and I repeated my plea to him.

"You are not German," he said.

"No. I am Ukrainian and my fiancé is Italian," I explained and, being afraid that he would not let me in, I began to cry.

"Do you want me to show you my documents?" I asked him.

"No, no. Come in," he said. "I know that they grab men on the streets."

"*Danke, danke schoöne!*"<sup>8</sup> I thanked him entering the room.

They invited me to sit on the chair and the woman offered me some water. I asked the woman if I could sit near the window where I could see the road coming from the hill.

As I waited, I told my hosts about our encounter with the Soviet soldiers, how they detained Giulio, how they chased me away, and how one of them was shooting at me because I was trying to see what they were doing to my fiancé. "That's why I am trying to hide from them now," I explained. "I don't know how the drunken soldier would behave if he sees that I am waiting again."

My hosts were sympathetic to me and the woman was trying to calm me down with kind words.

I didn't have to wait for long until I saw a man running very fast down the hill. "Giulio!" I screamed, jumping up and going out the door in a hurry. Crying now from joy, I ran up the hill toward him. I was soon out of breath; my heart was pounding as if it wanted to jump out of my chest, and I had to slow down, but I continued to walk until the moment when Giulio and I threw ourselves in each other's arms. Holding him tightly and breathing heavily, I was only able to repeat through my tears of joy, "Oh, Giulio, Giulio, Giulio..."

And he was answering, "I am here, I am here, I am here..."

Only after we were sure that indeed we were again together were we able to release our embrace. Giulio pulled out his handkerchief, dried out my tears, and said, "We both need to rest, but only for a short time. We better get out of here quickly before

they come down with the Germans and before that drunken soldier changes his mind."

"Don't worry," I said, "let's walk quickly; we will rest in the second house over there where the elderly couple allowed me to wait for you." And we began to walk fast. Giulio was holding my hand tightly as if he was making sure that I would not suddenly disappear.

"I really thought I would never see you again," I said.

"And I was afraid that the drunken soldier would kill you when he was shooting at you!" Giulio said, kissing my hand. "I knew from the tone of the soldier's voice that he was very upset with you, but I couldn't figure out why. I understood all that you said to him and there was nothing that could offend him."

"He saw that we were walking arm-in-arm and that you kissed me when we reached the top of the hill," I explained. "He called me many offensive names because I had selected a foreigner as my lover. His exact words were: 'Our Russian boys are not good enough for you?!' He got upset even more when I was insisting that I was an interpreter."

"That's why he called his German interpreter," reasoned Giulio, "he didn't believe that you would tell him the truth about me."

"We were lucky," I said, "that we were not wearing our wedding rings. Who knows how he would have reacted to that."

"For sure he would have taken them," replied Giulio. "Now that I understand why he was angry, we better walk fast before they order those Germans to march again."

We reached the house where I was hiding before and indeed the old couple was waiting for us at the door and invited us in.

The hosts were now very friendly and told us to wait in their house until the soldiers with the captured German men would pass by their house. The woman offered us some water and asked Giulio to tell them what happened to him after I was gone and why the soldiers had finally released him.

"Yes," I said, "tell us why the soldier kept you for so long."

And Giulio recounted what happened after the drunken soldier fired the last three shots at me.

We listened to Giulio's story, which, of course, he was telling in French and I was translating it into German for our hosts. But when I heard that the wife was explaining some words to her husband in Polish, I apologized that I didn't speak Polish, but began to include some words in Ukrainian, which they could understand.

"When you finally started to walk fast," Giulio told us, "the other soldier said something very calmly to the drunken one and he put down the gun. The German interpreter was standing close to me. The drunken soldier took my military card and a camp pass and gave them to the German, ordering him to translate.

"I said to the German interpreter, pointing at myself, 'Italian *Gefangene*.'<sup>9</sup> But the German looked at my documents as if he was studying them very carefully. And he was stalling to give an answer, as if he wanted to impress the soldier with his competent interpretation. Then he looked at me with disdain and turning to the soldier said very authoritatively, '*Italiansky Fascist*.'<sup>10</sup>

"I grabbed from his hands my military card and my camp pass and showed the soldier my photograph. Pointing with my finger at the five-pointed star on the collar of my uniform jacket, firmly said to him, '*Nyet, Fascist! Italiysky radiotelegraphist*.'<sup>11</sup> Then

I pointed at the German interpreter, almost touching his military uniform where the epaulets were torn out, and said as firmly as he did, '*Nyemetzky Fascist!*'<sup>12</sup> Then, showing the soldier my prisoner of war camp pass and pointing at myself, I said as clearly as I could in Russian, '*Italyansky voyennoplenny lager document.*'<sup>13</sup>

"The other soldier, who was listening to all of this without interfering, calmly said something to the drunken soldier. He must have told him something very convincing because the drunken soldier immediately changed his mind and ordered the German interpreter to go back and join his comrades. Then he placed his gun on the ground and began to search me by touching in all the places where I could have hidden items in my clothing. As he reached to inspect my arms and hands he saw my wristwatch. A satisfied smile illuminated his whole face and he ordered me, '*Davay chasy.*'<sup>14</sup> I knew this famous phrase very well and reluctantly removed my watch and gave it to the drunken soldier.

"He inspected it carefully from all sides and tried to wind it. Then he put it on his wrist and began to admire how it looked on him. He stroked slowly the slick shiny metal, like he was caressing it. Then he turned his hand toward the sun to see the reflection on the glass and emitted a sound of satisfaction with his loot, 'E-e-kh! *Italiansky chasy!*'

"Then he asked me to pull out all I had in my pockets. I had only my handkerchief and it made him angry again and he began cursing at me. I saw that the captured German men sitting on the grass watched with curiosity every move that the drunken Soviet soldier was making.

"The other soldier came close to us and I saw that he had Asian facial features, with slanted eyes and prominent cheek-bones. He placed his hand on the drunken soldier's shoulder and pointing to the watch on his wrist very calmly said to him, '*Tovarishch, khoroshiye chasy.*'<sup>15</sup> And I understood that he said something like, 'What more do you want? It is enough. Let the Italian go.'

"The drunken soldier extended his arm showing to his comrade my watch proudly, and he repeated with great satisfaction, '*Italiansky chasy.*'

'*Da, da,*'<sup>16</sup> said the other soldier, '*khoroshiye chasy.*'<sup>17</sup> Let the Italian go.'

"The drunken soldier looked at me and waved his hand, showing me that I could go. The Asian-looking soldier smiled at me and pointing to the road said 'Go, go, go.' And I took off quickly and never looked back."

I translated to our hosts the last sentence while Giulio paused for a while and then he concluded, "Now I know why I kept my watch so dearly, even when I was hungry as a prisoner of war I didn't exchange it for food. My watch was destined to save me from the stupid willfulness of a drunken Soviet soldier." Then he humbly added, "Thanks to the sound-mindedness of an Asian Soviet soldier."

Our hosts made some comments about the lawlessness of the soldiers during the war and Giulio said, "The winners are always right." The old man nodded agreement with Giulio's comment.

Suddenly we heard the muffled sound of many footsteps on the road. Hiding behind the curtains, we all watched from the windows as the German men guarded by the Soviet soldiers marched on the road. Now that we could watch them safely, we saw that most of them were in German military uniforms. I said to Giulio, "They are not taking them to the NKVD camp. They are prisoners of war."

Giulio pointed to the drunken soldier and said to our host, "That one took my

watch. And that one convinced the drunken one to let me go."

"You were lucky," the woman said to Giulio. And she said to me, "You were right to be afraid to encounter them for the second time."

And her husband added, "Never trust a drunk."

We waited for a while to be sure that they would be far ahead of us. Then Giulio looked at me and said, "Have you rested enough? It's time to go home."

"Yes," I answered, "but I am completely exhausted from all this ordeal."

We sincerely thanked our hosts for their hospitality. They wished us good luck and said they hoped we didn't have any more encounters with the Soviet soldiers. We didn't even ask them if they were Polish or Germans. It didn't matter—they were just kind people who were willing to help us.

As we got on the road, Giulio said, "As soon as we can, we will get off of the main road and walk on the secondary streets where we will be sure not encounter them again."

I agreed and tried to keep up with Giulio's quick pace. "It is late," I said. "My mother is already worrying about what happened to us."

"This time she is right to worry," answered Giulio.

When we arrived at our apartment my mother was waiting for us outside, and indeed she was already worried about why we were late.

"I was ready to go and look for you on the road," she said. "What happened to you? Why are you so late?"

As we were telling her about what happened to us, she was repeating, "I knew it, I knew it, that something bad happened to you. Now I will not be able to sleep all night worrying about it."

"Mama," I told her, "it is all over. We are here safe at home. Why should you be worrying all night now?"

"I will be thinking about what could have had happened, if you had been shot and Giulio detained, and all sorts of other things that could have happened to you."

"That's my mother," I said to Giulio, "she always finds something to worry about. If it didn't happen, then she will worry about what could have happened."

That evening Giulio and I were exhausted physically from our long walk and emotionally from what happened to us. The thought that we could have lost each other only a few hours ago sharpened our perception of how much we cared about each other and how much we needed each other. It made us feel more than ever before how deeply in love we were. And we fell asleep in each other's arms.

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1. The German spelling of the Polish name of the town is Gliwice.
  2. See chapters "The Prince of My Dreams," "Chance, Destiny or the Will Of God," "The Snapped Rope," "The NKVD Lager In Laband," and "It's Wonderful News!"
  3. Laband is the German name of the town with Polish name Labedy.
  4. Estimate from the map of Poland.
  5. A prestigious Swiss watch trademark.
  6. Katowitz is the German name of the town with Polish name Katowice.
  7. "Good day!" [in Russian].
  8. "Thank you, thank you very much!" [in German].
  9. Italian Prisoner Of War [in German].
  10. Italian Fascist [in Russian].
  11. "No, Fascist! Italian radiotelegrapher." [in Russian].

12. German Fascist [in Russian].
13. Italian Prisoners of War camp document [in Russian].
14. "Give me the watch!" [in Russian] a phrase that became almost synonymous with the name "Soviet Army soldier." During the WW II in Oberschlesia, Poland, the local people used to say, "Here comes 'Davay Chasy.'"
15. "Comrade, it's a nice watch" [in Russian].
16. "Yes, yes" [in Russian].
17. "Good watch" [in Russian].

## The Trip To the Soviet Consulate In Warsaw

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

When the trains from Laband began to travel again,<sup>1</sup> Giulio and I decided to attempt our trip to Warsaw<sup>2</sup> to see if we could receive an authorization for our marriage<sup>3</sup> from the Soviet consulate. To be able to make this trip, I waited until there were no new German men brought into the NKVD camp and asked Captain Komov to have two days off. When I told him that I would be going to the Soviet consulate in Warsaw, he sent me to ask permission from *Polkovnik* Stepanov.

Since nobody in the NKVD camp ever asked me to show them our marriage certificate, we believed they all assumed that Giulio and I were married. But we knew that they also assumed that my mother and I, like all Soviet citizens, had to return to the Soviet Union. Therefore, I told *Polkovnik* Stepanov that we were going to the Soviet consulate in Warsaw to ask permission for Giulio to go with us to the Soviet Union.

For those two days that I was absent my mother remained in Laband to be available to work in the NKVD camp if necessary. There was no reason for *Polkovnik* Stepanov to suspect that I might not return. He even wished me good luck in solving this problem quickly.

On the day of the departure we got up very early when it was still dark to take the earliest train from Laband to Katowitz, so we could return to Laband on the last train that night. It was a cloudy cold morning reminding us more of fall than spring weather, which was not unusual for that season in the region of Oberschlesia.

When we boarded the train, it was already full of passengers with all kinds of bags, suitcases, and baskets. Many were sitting on their luggage in the middle of the passageway, leaving barely enough space to put a foot down for those who needed to walk through. We found a place in the passageway not far from the exit door, where we both could stand supporting our backs against the wall.

Giulio said, "We don't have to travel for too long in this train, only to the station at Katowitz where we have to transfer to another train to Warsaw. Let's hope that we are able to find a place to sit in that train because we have to travel for about two hundred miles, and that probably will take several hours before we reach Warsaw."

Shortly after we left the station at Laband it began to rain; at first it was coming down slowly and then, as we traveled east, it increased in intensity. As we arrived in Katowitz, many passengers were changing trains and were in a hurry to get out and board the train to Warsaw. It was good that we were standing close to the exit door and

were among the first to come out and run in the drenching rain to the Warsaw train standing on another track.

This train was also full of passengers and all seats were already taken. But the passageway was not yet filled and we quickly walked its length to see if we could find some spot to sit. In one compartment I saw a little girl sleeping with her head in a woman's lap and the rest of her body lying on the bench, leaving a narrow space at the corner of the bench. I stopped and looked at the woman without saying a word. She pushed the girl's legs closer to the back of the bench and told me in Polish, "*Pani*,<sup>4</sup> sit here. You are skinny and don't need much space. It is better that we share it with you before some big man asks me to take her in my lap."

I thanked her and accommodated myself as best I could at the edge of the bench. Giulio stood in the passageway, leaning with his arm against the back of the bench and protecting me from the passengers who were coming aboard there and at every station where the train was stopping. In search for a place to stand they pushed themselves and their luggage without regard to anybody in their way. Giulio remained standing all those long hours until we reached Warsaw. I asked him several times to change places with me for a while but he stoically refused my offer.

Through the window streaked with rainwater we could see the dark gray sky. The rain was coming steadily but at times it was very heavy and we could hear how it was pounding on the roof of the car. The new passengers were coming in all drenched, and the air in the car became damp and filled with the smell of wet clothing and muddy shoes; all this in addition to the accumulated bluish pungent smoke from all kinds of tobacco men smoked, disregarding its effects on other passengers. Maybe, being pregnant, I was more sensitive to it than the others.

Under these conditions the trip seemed twice as long as it really was. Giulio and I occasionally exchanged a few words in French, but we preferred not to attract too much attention to the fact that we were foreigners, although Giulio was wearing his Italian Air Force uniform to authenticate his national origin in the Russian Consulate. He told me to try to nap if I could because ahead of us was a very long day and night before we returned home. But I couldn't sleep even if I wanted to because of the nauseating smell in the car.

Finally the conductor announced that the train was coming to Warsaw. The lethargic passengers aroused from hours of inertia and began to get up, to look for their luggage; some even attempted, though not very successfully, to move closer to the exit. I think that train was not going any farther, because all passengers were getting out of the train.

The misty rain encountered us outside. With our heads bent down and looking only in front of us, we hurried to follow the others to the building used as a temporary station. When we raised our heads, we saw against the background of low, dark clouds the remains of the Warsaw station. Its collapsed walls resembled the skeleton of some monstrous crippled animal. Knowing the awesome effects of powerful explosions, Giulio commented, "Obviously, they had heavy aerial or artillery bombardments here. Only heavy bombs or shells could have inflicted such extensive damage."

But we were in a hurry and had to follow the other passengers through the temporary station. We exited outside hoping to find streetcars going to the city. Instead we found several horse-pulled wagons. The big wooden freight wagons had been

adapted for transporting people by adding canvas-covered roofs and several rows of boards to seat as many passengers as possible. The coachmen were loudly announcing their routes. I approached the first coachman and asked him in Russian, "*Sovietsky Consulat?*"

He pointed to another wagon where the coachman was announcing, "The Old City."

I asked him, "*Sovietsky Consulat?*"

"*Tak, Paninka,*"<sup>5</sup> he answered in Polish and, extending his hand, said how many zloty we had to pay him before climbing on the wagon. Giulio paid him and the man helped us to climb up and gestured to where we should sit on the boards to leave the center free for the passage of other passengers. I said to Giulio, "Let's sit here in front so we could see the city. At least we will be able to tell that we saw the city of Warsaw."

Glad to be out of the rain, we accommodated ourselves on the second board behind the driver and observed the other passengers climbing into the wagon. Then I saw that the horse attached to the wagon was small and skinny. I said to Giulio, "Look at that poor horse. Do you think she will be able to pull this heavy wagon full of people and luggage?"

"The owner must know if she can," answered Giulio. "If he kills the horse, he will be out of business tomorrow."

When the wagon was full, the coachman gently patted the side of the horse, awaking her from her nap. Then he climbed on his seat, took the reins, and prompted the horse by cracking a whip in the air. It took the horse several attempts to start moving the wagon, but once it began to roll she walked at a slow steady pace as if she was in a trance.

The driver explained to the passengers that to reach the Old City we had to travel through the New City and cross the River Vistula. From the dark dirty-gray sky the rain was coming in a steady fine drizzle, filling the air with a mist that prevented us from clearly seeing the outlines of the tall multistory buildings in the distance.

As we came closer, we could see just the remnants of the buildings' walls. Some walls remained standing with empty holes where doors and windows had been. These tall walls stood here and there all along the road on which we traveled, and it seemed that a light wind could make them tumble down on us. Some walls were partially or completely crumbled, with piles of rubble filling the inner space between wall outlines. Giulio said, "It looks like it was a carpet bombing. The whole area is completely destroyed. Nobody could have survived it."

I wondered, "Why do they continue to call it the New City? Maybe only because it was built in more recent times? Now, after it was completely destroyed by the bombardments, the more appropriate name for it would be the Ghost City."

Giulio was shaking his head in disbelief that such complete destruction of this big city could have happened and was telling me his thoughts about it. "Did this happen at the beginning of the war when the Germans first conquered Poland? Or did it happen only recently when the Soviet Army was fighting the Germans here? As you know, during the war this information about the battles was cleverly concealed and distorted in favor of the Germans, even during the time when I was in the Italian Air Force.

But after I became a prisoner of war there was almost a complete blackout of war-related news. It didn't get much better following our change of status to foreign

workers and before the Soviets arrived in Laband. We had to rely on word of mouth for news about the front line and the situation in Europe and Germany. We lived in the midst of war-torn Europe and at the same time were completely isolated from what was going on around us."

"It's true," I agreed, "But think only how lucky we were to live through the whole war and never be in the midst of such terrible battles! They were always somewhere else, not where we were. For some unknown reason, the places we lived changed hands without fighting. During the whole war I never saw anyone being wounded or killed, I only heard about it."

"I witnessed," replied Giulio, "when one German pilot crashed on an airfield, and as he was burning inside he screamed, 'Water! Water!' But the flames were so strong that it was impossible to save him".

The horse was walking at an even slower pace and the coachman never tried to make her go faster. It took a long time for her to bring us to the River Vistula. The coachman said, "Here is the bridge and across the river is the Old City." We looked ahead trying to see the bridge but we couldn't see it. The wagon began to roll down toward the river and the horse had to sustain the weight to keep it from going down too fast.

Finally, we saw a pontoon bridge built on one side of the skeleton of the old destroyed bridge. The horse walked carefully now as the whole wagon was shifting from one side to another on the uneven and oscillating surface. The misty light that filtered through the gray sky reflected in the water and made everything look muddy-drab-gray like in a black-and-white poorly focused photograph. It included the shaded panorama of the Old City that we could barely see across the river.

When we entered the Old City, we could see that it had not been as devastated by the bombardments and we were able to see many antique style buildings. Giulio said, "This part of Warsaw looks like any other old European city. It is too bad that it is raining and we don't have enough time to see it. In all probability, we will never return here."

The coachman stopped several times to let off passengers who had reached their destination. Then he stopped and told us, "*Sovietsky Consulat*." We got down from the wagon and I asked him when he would be coming by to return to the station. He replied that when we were ready we should wait near the main door of the consulate building; if we didn't make it by the time when he returned, another coachman would be coming by.

When Giulio and I entered the building of the Soviet consulate we saw lots of people in the waiting room. Several employees were selecting who would be seen by the consul first and were showing them to enter the anteroom to wait their turn.

A woman employee asked us our reason for coming to see the consul. She was a very friendly middle-age woman and I told her that I was pregnant and that we had come to ask for authorization to be married so we could go to the Soviet Union together. She treated us in a somewhat motherly way and allowed us to enter the anteroom very soon after we arrived. We didn't have to wait long for our turn; most of the people were dismissed rather quickly by the consul, who was calling "Next!" loudly before the previous visitors were out of his office.

When our turn came, we entered the consul's office and saluted him; he answered in a laconic manner like he was tired of saluting people. He didn't ask us to sit

down, although there were chairs in front of his desk. I introduced myself, "I am Olga Gladkaya."<sup>6</sup> Then pointing to Giulio said, "He is Giulio Verro, an Italian prisoner of war."

"Why did you come to see me?" he asked without seeking any other information about us.

"We came to ask for authorization for a marriage between the Soviet and the Italian citizens. We want to go together to the Soviet Union."

The consul didn't show any regard to our feelings as persons who were seeking his help and answered very coldly, "Each of you shall return to your own country. Marriages between Soviet citizens and citizens of other countries are prohibited. Those are the orders I have."

I translated it in French to Giulio, who told me to present the other argument to which we agreed before. And I said to the consul, "We want to get married because we are going to have a baby and we want this child to have both a mother and a father."

Without showing any emotion on his face, which remained like it was made of stone, the consul answered in a laconic voice, sounding like he had recited this answer many times, "The orders do not allow for any exceptions." And he repeated, "Each of you shall return to your own country."

Then he assumed a sarcastic expression on his face and added cynically, "This war has left millions of children without fathers. It doesn't make any difference if there is one more fatherless child." And he looked at us as if he wanted to get rid of us as soon as possible.

I translated his answer in French to Giulio, who was shocked to hear such cold disregard to his unborn child. He looked at the consul with disdain and told him in French, "It does matter to me and to my child!" And said to me, "Translate it to him!"

As I was translating it, Giulio abruptly grabbed my arm and pulling me toward the door told me in French, "Let's go! We don't have anything else to do here!"

He had done it so quickly that I didn't have a chance to finish the translation to the consul, who was not listening to me anyway and was already calling, "Next!"

On our way through the anteroom the woman employee who had interviewed us before came close to me and whispered, "The answer was 'No'?" I made a sign with my head confirming it. "Why do you want to return to the Soviet Union? Don't you know what awaits you there? It is better for you to go to Italy," she suggested, whispering in my ear. She looked around to see if there was anyone near who could hear her and continued whispering to me, "You should go to Prague, in Czechoslovakia. There is an Italian consulate. They don't have such orders prohibiting marriages with Soviet citizens. Good luck to you!" And she quickly squeezed my hand and returned to the table where she had been working before.

When we walked outside, the rain had diminished somewhat and we walked back and forth on the sidewalk waiting for the coachman. I told Giulio word for word what the woman employee had whispered in my ear. Giulio perked up and, as he often did, replied with an Italian proverb, "*Non si chiude mai una porta, senza che il Dio ne apra una finestra.*" And he translated it to me in French, "God never shuts one door without opening a window."

"That woman employee gave us her advice at her own risk," I said.

Giulio replied, "There are still some good people in this world." He reflected for a while and said almost with regret, "Well, it seems that I have to give up on seeing the

Soviet Union." After a short pause he concluded, "Now we have only one place to go, to Italy."

We were out of the Soviet consulate so quickly that the same coachman with the skinny horse gave us a ride back to the railroad station, and we were able to get on an earlier train that was ready to depart from Warsaw going west. Being among the last ones to get on the train, we found it filled to capacity and couldn't go farther than the door leading to the passageway of the car. However, it worked to our advantage because after the train was on its way, Giulio saw a conductor opening and sitting down on his pull-down seat located next to the door.

Giulio grabbed my hand and, pulling me, pushed his way toward the conductor. Without saying a word Giulio carefully pulled from breast-pocket of his uniform a bunch of Polish zloty and inconspicuously placed them in the conductor's hand. Then he pointed at me and at the conductor's seat. The conductor inspected the amount of money and put the bills in his pocket smiling.

He got up and said to me respectfully, "*Proshu Panochka*,<sup>7</sup> sit down here."

I said, as respectfully as he did, "*Dzenkuyu*,<sup>8</sup> conductor." And I sat on the conductor's seat.

Giulio stood in front of me again during the whole trip, as he had on the other train, and shielded me with his body from the pressure of other standing passengers.

I said, "It was quick thinking. Thank you, my dear."

He replied, "If one has the money, the right price can buy almost anything. I gave him everything that was left in my pocket. After all, we had designated this money for our trip to Warsaw."

During the long hours on the train Giulio and I discussed in a soft voice in French how to tell my mother about what happened at the consulate. We decided not to tell her right away about the possibility of going to Prague to the Italian consulate because it could upset her too much. "We will tell her at the right time," said Giulio. "There is no need to worry her now before we find a way to get there."

We arrived in Laband much earlier than we had planned. My mother was surprised to see us back so soon and she concluded, "You didn't accomplish anything. Right?"

"Right," we replied. And Giulio and I recounted word for word our audience with the Soviet consul. Giulio was still outraged with the cruel remarks of the consul and he said to her, "That swine had the nerve to tell us sarcastically, 'This war has left millions of children without fathers. It doesn't make any difference if there is one more fatherless child.'"

On the next day *Polkovnik* Stepanov came to our apartment to find out the results of our visit to the Soviet consulate. As usual, we offered him a drink of our home-made *kvass*, which he really enjoyed.

"Well, what have you accomplished in Warsaw?" he asked us.

I said, "Do you want to hear the exact words of the consul? They say it all." And I recited them for Polkovnik, "Each of you shall return to your own country. Those are the orders that I have." Then I repeated the consul's answer to Giulio's plea that he wanted his child to have a father, "The orders do not allow for any exceptions. This war has left millions of children without fathers. It doesn't make any difference if there is one more fatherless child." And I told him that Giulio had the courage to say to the consul, "It

makes a difference to me, and to my child.”

*Polkovnik* Stepanov was standing in the kitchen listening to me and sipping our *kvass*. While I was telling him all this, he was nodding his head as he was trying to remember the exact words of the consul. When I finished, he stood for a few seconds silent reflecting on the simplistic authoritarian orders, which the consul applied without regard to human feelings.

Then he remarked in a sympathetic tone of voice, “So, the consul said ‘There are no exceptions.’ Yes, it’s very easy for him to say, but it is not so easy for you to accept.”

I felt that this was the right moment to tell him that the employee at the consulate had told us that both the Italian and the Soviet Consulates are in Prague; there we could clear our situation of the mixed nationality marriage. However, we would wait until the trains going there would allow us to travel to Czechoslovakia.

“You see,” concluded *Polkovnik* Stepanov, “you have to be patient—do not give up hope. Time changes many things. As the life in Europe becomes more normal, it could bring the solution to your situation.”

We perceived these words of *Polkovnik* Stepanov, a high-ranking NKVD officer, as a subtle message to us that we should look for other ways to solve our problem. Therefore, since *Polkovnik* Stepanov agreed that it was a good idea for us to wait and go to Prague, I also told Captain Komov, *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov, doctor Ludmila Larionovna, and her assistant Zina about this. Therefore, it became known to all of them that we were waiting for the opportunity to go to Prague. We didn’t want them to be surprised when we suddenly went there.

On the eighth of May 1945, the news about the end of the war had spread quickly in the NKVD camp, among the Soviet military, and among the population of Laband. The NKVD officers, agents, and guards were celebrating and talking about going home. The local Polish population was rejoicing; they proudly wore the national colored ribbons attached to their clothing and were hoping that the Soviet troops would go home soon.

The Soviet citizens in the hamlet were also happy about the end of the war, but their joy was short-lived because they dreaded the moment when they would be deported against their will back to the Soviet Union. They were mostly women and children, the families of the *Volksdeutsche*, and some of the specialist workers. Many of them didn’t speak very well either German, or Polish, so they could not just walk away from the hamlet of Laband and disappear among the local population; they knew they would be found anywhere by the Soviets. Therefore, they had no choice but to stay in the hamlet and wait with apprehension for the forced deportation to the Soviet concentration camps.

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1. This story was recounted through the years so many times to so many people that all the details remained vividly in memory.

2. Capital of Poland.

3. See the chapters “Chance, Destiny, or the Will of God,” “The NKVD Lager in Laband,” “It’s Wonderful News!” and “Giulio’s Watch.”

4. Mrs. [in Polish].

5. “Yes, Miss.” [in Polish].

6. Russian spelling of a feminine last name Gladky.

7. “Please, Young Lady.” [in Polish].

8. “Thank you” [in Polish].

# Becoming Entrepreneurs

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and Giulio Verro

From the time the Soviet Army troops occupied Laband they allowed the Polish to take over the local civilian government because the region of *Oberschlesia* belonged to Poland before it was annexed by Germany at the beginning of World War II. The Polish central government was slow in gaining control and in coordinating with the regional and local governments, whose powers were limited by the occupying Soviet Army. Therefore, the local civilian government didn't function with the same efficiency and order as it did under the Germans. For a long time there was no bread available for the population and the families had to find food by bartering, first in the neighboring villages, and later, as the Polish zloty again became an accepted monetary unit, by selling anything they had and buying food in big regional markets in the towns like Katowitz.

After our visit to Gleiwitz, where Giulio encountered and talked with the group of Italians, he decided to try his luck on the market.<sup>1</sup> We had many women's dresses and household linens that were left to us by our *Volksdeutsche* neighbors<sup>2</sup> when they escaped from the advancing Soviet Army. Giulio suggested that we couldn't take it all with us when the time came to leave Poland either to the Soviet Union or to Italy. My mother also liked the idea of going to the market and she began to sort and prepare the items that we could take.

This decision came at a time when the number of German men being brought to the NKVD camp had diminished considerably and my mother and I were working only a few days a week when Captain Komov called us to register the newly arrived men.<sup>3</sup> We still were receiving daily rations from the camp's kitchen but we anticipated some changes very soon when our services in the NKVD camp would not be needed. Therefore, we had to think about new ways of finding food.

The first time all three of us, my mother, Giulio, and I, went to the market in Katowitz. Although there was a train going from Laband to Gleiwitz, we didn't have enough Polish zloty to pay for the three tickets and we had to walk there. My mother and I decided that, since it was already the summer season, we should begin by selling the women's cotton dresses. We packed them for Giulio to carry because we had to walk to Gleiwitz on the same unpaved country road where only a few weeks before the drunken Soviet soldier had fired at me and taken Giulio's watch.<sup>4</sup> This time we took our NKVD camp passes and Giulio's documents just in case we had another unpleasant encounter.

As we walked, Giulio and I remembered the whole episode and showed my mother the infamous place where it happened. But we had to change our subject of conversation because my mother felt overly anxious about our safety on that road. In Gleiwitz we took the streetcar, which brought us to the market at Katowitz.

Our first attempt to do business at the market was not very successful. The dresses were not in big demand, especially because the size of our skinny neighbor was

far too small for the robust Polish peasant women who brought food to the market. My mother managed to barter one or two dresses for some butter and a few eggs. But we found out that what was in great demand with these women were aprons. As we were returning home, we had plenty of time to evaluate our first experience at the market.

I told them, "I have an idea. If the demand is for aprons, we could very easily transform all those small size dresses into large size aprons to fit the stout peasant women." My mother and Giulio approved my proposition unanimously.

I borrowed a hand-operated sewing machine from my aunt and began to use my imagination and my sewing skills in transforming dresses into aprons. Giulio and my mother were taking them at least once a week to the market.

Giulio would put several aprons on each arm and holding them horizontally would display them by walking between the tables where the Polish peasant women were selling their food products. He was attracting their attention by calling loudly in Polish only one word: "*Fartuky! Fartuky!*"<sup>6</sup> My mother was walking beside him acting as a saleswoman, demonstrating and fitting the aprons, and contracting for a price or bartering it for a product. This enterprise was very successful and we enriched our diet with a variety of foods: butter, eggs, farmer's cheese, milk, sour cream, and vegetables.

But the supply of dresses that we had was going down very fast and we began to sell the bed linen, such as the sheets and pillowcases, and the other household linen, such as the tablecloths and bath and kitchen towels, which were also left to us by our generous next-door neighbor. Now we had some Polish zloty and we could afford to take the train from Laband to Gleiwitz, but Giulio's job was still to carry these heavy items and to help my mother sell them on the market.

Soon, my mother began to barter for my aunt and, through her, the word spread. The other women who could not go to the market themselves because they had small children began to ask her to sell their items and to buy them food products, giving her small commission.

Another source of commissions came from the NKVD camp's doctor Ludmila Larionovna and her assistant Zina, who were tired of the camp's cafeteria food and wanted to have some fresh farm products. Eventually, some other NKVD officers also began to give orders to my mother to buy them some food that they didn't have in their rations.

Then my mother's business began to grow because Ludmila Larionovna and other NKVD officers also began to give her orders to buy for them variety of items they wanted for themselves or as gifts for their families. Giulio was acting as a partner who was in charge of carrying goods to and from the market and in finding the requested products.

I went to the market only occasionally. Most of the time when we didn't have to work in the NKVD camp I was sewing the layette for the baby from our next-door neighbor's items. My aunt had some patterns that she had used in sewing for her baby and now they came in handy for me. I made tiny infant's shirts and caps from fine batiste lingerie adorned with lace, entre-deux,<sup>6</sup> and embroidery. Some I finished by crocheting the edges with colored embroidery floss bartered for sugar from my aunt. I made several sets of diapers from bed sheets and made several baby blankets by cutting a lightweight blanket and crocheting the hems with yarn.

When I made many items for baby layette, I brought them to show to my aunt.

She was surprised with the work I made from the items I had and said to me, "I always knew that you were an intellectual type girl and were a very good student, but I never imagined that you were able to sew and to be so creative."

"It is never late," I said to her, "to change your opinion, especially when it is for the best. But you should know that as a young girl I sewed a lot of dresses for my doll and knew how to crochet and embroider."

After a while she said to me, "You know, if you don't get offended, I will tell you something else that I never expected from you."

"Is it something bad?" I asked her.

"Well, not bad," she replied, "but you may perceive it that way. But I don't mean it to be bad."

I was intrigued and wanted to know what it was and promised her, "Well, tell me what it is, I will not be offended."

"Well, I always believed," she confessed, "that you were a naive and unworldly young girl who would have a hard time finding a husband. I would have never expected that you were capable of catching a man by making him the father of your child."

Astonished with her reasoning I said to her, "Antonina Yulyevna, not every young girl or woman is in pursuit of a man at any cost. You should realize that some girls do fall in love and are loved in return. It just happens that I am very much in love with Giulio and he is in love with me. He asked me to marry him before the Soviets arrived here. To catch a man one has to deceive him into marrying her. In my case it is very improbable that we will ever get married. You know very well that sooner or later we will be deported to the concentration camps in Siberia. Giulio and I love each other on borrowed time. I just decided that I deserve to have a little bit of happiness before forces beyond our control separate us and we lose each other forever. I am very happy that I will have his child to remember the happiness we had for the short time that destiny allowed us to be together."

Antonina Yulyevna placed her hand on my shoulder in a friendly gesture and said, "I am sorry for having such thoughts about you. I am glad that you are happy. I can see that Giulio loves you very much. You are lucky - he is a fine young man."

She paused for a while and emitting a deep sigh said, "Don't remind me about deportation. I don't know where the Soviets will deport you and your mother because you work in the NKVD camp, but us, the *Volksdeutsche*, they will surely send to the concentration camps. It is on everybody's mind here in the hamlet." She covered her eyes with her hands, like she didn't wanted me to see what she was thinking and said, "My poor children! What will happen to them?!"

I took this opportunity to ask her, "Antonina Yulyevna, why didn't you evacuate with the children when Igor was telling you to go to your friends who lived near the French border? You would have been safe there now."

"You see," she began hesitantly, "Igor and I quarreled a lot because for some time we had marital problems and I believed that by sending us away, he wanted to get rid of me and the children. I was afraid to remain alone, especially with the new baby that was to be born any time, and I insisted that we all go together. I waited hoping that he would come with us, until it was too late. I never expected that he would walk away at the last moment and leave me alone with the children."

She didn't tell me what kind of marital problems they had and I didn't insist on

finding out. I assumed that they probably were of an intimate nature and she didn't feel comfortable talking to me about them. I felt that she was wrong in blaming her husband for what had happened and that she should blame herself for being so stubborn by remaining in Laband; my uncle had tried to send her and the children to a safe place where they could be reunited after the war, or maybe even sooner. But I did not reproach her because I believed that she was punished enough by her destiny.

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1. See the chapter "Giulio's Watch."
2. See the chapter "The Prince of My Dreams."
3. See the chapter "The NKVD Camp in Laband."
4. See the chapter "Giulio's Watch."
5. "Aprons! Aprons!" [in Polish].
6. Narrow inset of lace.

*This chapter is dedicated to my uncle Igor M. Gladky's family  
that was deported from Poland to the Soviet concentration camp in  
1945.*

-Olga Gladky Verro.

## Deportation Of Soviet Citizens by the NKVD

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and Giulio Verro

Not long after I had the conversation with my aunt about the inevitability of deportation to the concentration camps, the NKVD Repatriation Unit especially designated for the deportation of the Soviet citizens to the Soviet Union arrived in Laband.<sup>1</sup> Although they set up residences and offices in the same camp with the NKVD unit that was deporting the German men to the Soviet Union, they functioned completely independently of each other.

Right after their arrival the Soviet Repatriation Officers took a census in the hamlet of all the families that came from the Soviet Union, from the Baltic States, and from the part of Poland annexed to the Soviet Union before the German's surprise attack. The census included the *Volksdeutsche* and the specialist workers' families. They were ordered not to move from the hamlet until they were notified to get ready for, as they called it, the "repatriation home," which in reality meant the forced deportation to the NKVD concentration camps.

The *Volksdeutsche* families had a lot of baggage because when the Germans evacuated them from the Soviet Union to Germany they were allowed to bring everything with them they liked except furniture. Now the Soviet Repatriation Officers told them the same thing, that they should take all their possessions with them when they would be departing "back home." They promised to provide transportation from their apartments to the railroad station. My aunt was satisfied that they were allowed to take everything with them because it meant that they would have all the things

necessary to get started when they arrived wherever they were deported. Like all the other *Volksdeutsche*, she didn't believe that their destination was their hometown because she knew from the destiny of her three brothers that having German origins meant deportation to a concentration camp in the far region of the Soviet Union.

At the time this happened, my mother and I were still working in the NKVD camp as interpreters for the NKVD unit which was in charge of deporting the German men to the Soviet Union. We lived on one side of a duplex house standing next to the NKVD camp gate and it didn't look as a part of the hamlet's workers's apartment complex. Therefore, we were not included in the census of Soviet citizens and no one told us to get ready for the repatriation. We assumed that maybe it was because we worked in the NKVD camp, but we certainly didn't go to ask anybody why we were not included.

Now the number of German men being brought to the camp had diminished considerably and we worked only a few hours one or two days during the week, but we went every day to get our rations in the kitchen. Every day we saw either Captain Komov, or *Polkovnik* Stepanov, or *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov, and none of them mentioned anything about the census or the repatriation to the Soviet Union. And nobody told us that my mother and I were remaining in Laband because we were needed in the camp as interpreters. They all behaved as though nothing special that should concern us was going on and we did the same. After all, we were told right from the beginning that we were drafted to work in the NKVD camp for as long as they needed us.

My mother and I were very fond of my little cousin Nanochka and begged my aunt to leave her with us. We were trying to convince my aunt that it would alleviate her burden of having to care and provide for two small children, the baby, and an old mother, but she wouldn't hear of it.

Sometime in the last week of August my cousin Fredik came to our apartment with a message, "Mama said to tell you that we were ordered to get ready for tomorrow morning for a departure 'home.'" We knew what it meant and all three of us, my mother, Giulio, and I, went immediately to my aunt's apartment.

She encountered us with tears in her eyes saying, "It's tomorrow morning! The Repatriation Officers have given an order in the hamlet to the *Volksdeutsche* and to all other families from the Soviet Union to be ready with all their belongings. They told us not to leave anything here, especially food and clothing, that there would be plenty of carts pulled by horses to carry us to the train."

My aunt was almost finished with packing all the nonessential items. She had begun this task when the Repatriation Officers took a census in the hamlet and told them to be ready to go "home." We asked my aunt what she needed for the trip that we could give her. She said, "Any kind of nonperishable food that you can give us would be helpful. Who knows if they will feed us during the trip, which may be very long. And if you have some old blankets, we could use them to put on the floor in the freight car. I don't expect that they will be transporting us in the passenger cars with all the luggage that they told to take with us."

My mother told Giulio and me, "Go home and bring the heavy sky-blue bedspread and a blanket that you decided not to take with you because they are too heavy to carry. And also bring a loaf of bread and a big bag of the dry bread that we kept to make *kvass*." Then she decided, "I better come with you. Maybe I will find some other food that we can give them."

My aunt reminded us, "Don't forget to bring back my sewing machine. It will be very handy for me to sew clothes for the children, for me, and for Babushka."

When we arrived home, Giulio said, "We should give her sugar for the children. There is some left in the bag that we got from the railroad car in the first days of the Soviet occupation. We can buy sugar for ourselves on the market." My mother also found a piece of lard that they could eat with the bread. My aunt was glad that we gave her the sugar that was needed to put in the water for the little baby Igor when he was crying. Giulio helped my aunt pack some big items and made another trip to our apartment to bring some rope to wrap them. He promised her he would come the next morning to help her load her belongings on the cart.

The next morning, the day of the departure, my mother, Giulio, and I went to my aunt's apartment. Giulio helped bring out the heavy items and my mother and I stayed inside with Nanochka and Fredik, keeping them and us away from the Repatriation Officers and Soviet Army soldiers who watched everybody load the carts.

As soon as one family was ready, a Repatriation Officer would check them on his list, order them to climb on the cart; then he would climb on the front of the cart, sit next to the driver and order the soldier to drive away. As the carts were passing by on the street between the rows of apartment buildings, the departing family solemnly saluted their neighbors, who answered them with the somber "good-bye," as if they were going to a funeral.

Before my aunt was ready, some of the drivers returned from the railroad station to take another family. My aunt found out that they were taking them to a freight train waiting on the secondary tracks at the station in Laband and that there were many Repatriation Officers and Army soldiers watching to make sure no one escaped.

When all my aunt's possessions were loaded, it came time to say our last "good-bye" to my aunt, Babushka, and the children. It was a sad day; we all had tears in our eyes; everyone, except the children, knew that for them the hard times were ahead and that probably we would not see each other for a very long time, or maybe forever. We embraced each other several times before leaving the apartment. "If you have a chance to see Igor again," said my aunt, "tell him what happened to me and to our children. Tell him to search for us in the camps where the *Volksdeutsche* are deported."

She wished Giulio and me good luck to remain together and to take care of our baby. Then she asked my mother, "What will happen to you?"

"Whatever destiny has in store for me," my mother replied and asked again if her sister-in-law would leave her daughter Nanochka with us. But Antonina Yulyevna answered categorically that all her children would stay with her.

At the last moment I remembered to give her Giulio's Italian address and told her to write to him, to send her address, and to tell him what happened to them.

"Remember that my father and Igor have Giulio's address too and you may also find out what happened to your husband, if he writes to Giulio."

"Are you kidding," replied my aunt bitterly, "the NKVD would never allow us to send letters from the concentration camp to a foreign country. My brothers were not able to write to their families in their own country when they were arrested before the war. And you are telling me to write to Italy!"

When we got out of the apartment and stood on the sidewalk we were exchanging the conventional phrases that people use in a normal situation when

relatives move to another town, as if we wanted to forget how tragic this departure was.

Suddenly the Repatriation Officer arrived and asked, "Are you ready?" And without waiting for the answer ordered, "Climb on the cart!"

Giulio first helped Babushka to climb up and my aunt gave her little Igor to hold in her arms. Then he helped Nanochka, Fredik, and Antonina Yulyevna to climb up and they settled as best they could on top of the bundles.

The Repatriation Officer counted them again and checked on his list. Then he climbed on the front of the cart and sat next to the driver. He made a sign with his hand that he was ready to go and the driver pulled the reins. The wheels of the cart emitted a squeaky sound like the cry of a wounded bird and slowly began to move. As the cart rolled away on the street, the children and my aunt were waving to us and we waved back to them; then, as the cart turned on the corner, we had our last glimpse of my aunt and my three little cousins.

"Poor children, poor Antonina Yulyevna!" said my mother.

And I commented, "You know, if we were still living in the hamlet, we probably would have been departing with them now."

"And if you were not working for the NKVD," added Giulio.

"And probably, if *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov was not interested in my services to his lover, the doctor, in bartering items for her on the market," added my mother.

"Maybe all of these added together," concluded Giulio.

All saddened, with heavy hearts, we returned to our apartment near the NKVD camp gate.

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1. Forced deportation to the Soviet concentration camps of all Soviet citizens who by the end of WWII were in occupied Germany was called "repatriation home." In fact, it was a punishment for all of them who were coined by the Soviets as "traitors, collaborators, and war criminals" regardless of how and why they got there.

## The Three Thousand Zloty Solution

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and Giulio Verro

In the weeks that followed<sup>1</sup> the deportation of Soviet citizens<sup>2</sup> from Laband by the special NKVD division, the number of German men brought to the NKVD camp had diminished so much that we worked only when we were requested to come by Captain Komov. Now we were going several times a week to the market in Katowitz. For some time my mother had been taking commissions from the NKVD doctor Lyudmila Larionovna<sup>3</sup> to buy all kinds of lingerie and clothing items. One day she was asked to find out if there was a jeweler in Katowitz and if he was interested in bartering a gold coin for gold jewelry and she gave it to my mother under strict instructions not to reveal that it belonged to her.

My mother, Giulio, and I went to the jewelry store in Katowitz and showed the owner the gold coin. When the owner examined it, he expressed an interest in making the transaction and showed us some gold jewelry that Lyudmila Larionovna wanted to

have in exchange. Giulio examined each piece, checked how many karats were marked on it, and then together we selected the ones that we thought would appeal to Lyudmila Larionovna. To complete the transaction my mother was able to bargain with the jeweler to add some zloty for her services, promising him that she would come back in his store if she had some other orders for jewelry. Probably the gold coin was more valuable than the jewelry he gave in barter, because he didn't bargain too hard and my mother made a good commission on the transaction.

Giulio used this occasion to ask the jeweler if he was interested in the jeweler's lathe that he found on the barge<sup>4</sup> where we also found our wedding rings and he described in detail what kind of machine it was.

The jeweler replied, "If it is as good as you are telling me, I will be interested. Bring it here so I can see what condition it is." He didn't express much interest in the watch springs that we got in the same place, but told him to bring them anyway.

We were returning to Laband in a good mood considering that our trip to Katowitz was very successful. My mother bought more food with her commission, Giulio found where to sell his jeweler's lathe, and I was happy that the jewel-ry items for our doctor-friend were really beautiful and anticipated her joy in receiving them. I considered her now as "my" doctor because she was very kind in monitoring my pregnancy and in giving me good advice; but most of all, I expected her to assist me in the childbirth if I was still in Laband when it happened.

As we were traveling in the streetcar back to Gleiwitz, on one of the stops Giulio saw his Polish friend Rufin Swizsi, whom he had worked with before at the *Presswerke Laband* in the telephone workshop. He was waiting on the platform for the streetcar going in another direction. Windows in our car were opened and Giulio called him, "Rufin! Rufin!" He came close to the window and both were very surprised to see each other.

"Giulio, you have remained here? I thought you were gone with the other Italians!" Then Rufin saw me from the window and asked, "Are you staying with Olga? You should come and visit me this Sunday. I work in Zabrze, that's Hindenburg in German." He tore a piece of paper from a package he was holding and wrote his home address: "Rufin Swizsi, Michalkowice, ul. Graniczna, 5."

Our streetcar doors were closing and, in giving his address to Giulio when we were already moving, Rufin added, "You take the streetcar to my town right here!"

"What a surprise," said Giulio, "to encounter him at the streetcar stop. We are definitely going to see him on Sunday. He has my camera that I bartered with him for food when I was a prisoner of war. We will ask him to make some photos of us."

I agreed, "You are right. Do you realize that we don't have any photo of each other except the snapshots from the automatic camera that was making pictures for the documents."

My mother said to Giulio, "I saw that they sell cameras at the market. Our business is going well. Why don't you look to see if you can find one to buy for yourself?"

"If I sell the jeweler's lathe," answered Giulio, "I definitely will look for one to buy." And he added, "Next week I will bring the lathe to the jeweler before he changes his mind."

On Sunday Giulio and I went to visit Rufin. Michalkowice was a small town near the town of Katowitz and with the help of local people we easily found the street and the house. Rufin was genuinely happy to see Giulio. He introduced us to his lovely wife, Lidia,

who was already cooking a dinner in our honor.

To communicate we used four languages. Rufin and Lidia spoke German and Polish but, since Giulio could not understand it very well, I had to translate to him in French and to translate Giulio's answers to Rufin and Lidia from French to either German or Polish, sometimes mixed with Ukrainian words. But we understood everything and had fun remembering the days when we were working at the *Presswerke* Laband.

Giulio told Rufin about their German coworker Kiklas being in the NKVD camp and how he had managed so far not to be deported to the Soviet Union. He also told him the sad news about another coworker, Kramer, who died on the roof of one of the buildings where he was with a machine-gun as a member of the civil defense unit when the Soviet Army took over the *Presswerke*.

Rufin already knew that the Germans had taken everybody from the camp, including the Italians, into Germany. "I was very lucky," said Giulio, "to come to Olga's place in the morning and to remain with her that night because her father and his brother had escaped from the Soviets. That one day and night made the difference between being together or losing each other forever."

I was already showing the signs of pregnancy and Rufin jokingly said, "I see that you didn't lose any time and are expecting a baby."

"We are very happy about it," answered Giulio, embracing me gently. "But we need to solve one big problem—the Soviet authorities won't give us permission to get married."

When we recounted what happened to us when we visited the Soviet consulate in Warsaw,<sup>5</sup> Rufin and Lidia were appalled to hear the exact words of the Soviet consul. Then we told them about our decision to go to the Italian consulate in Prague to see if we could receive permission to go to Italy together. "But that would be much easier," said Giulio, "if we had a certificate of marriage."

Rufin reflected for a few seconds and replied, "I work in the Town Hall in Zabrze and I know that legally it is impossible to do because the Soviets are very strict in prohibiting marriages of the Soviet citizens with any person of another country. But if you want to have only the certificate of marriage without actually officially registering the marriage..." He looked at both of us with a cunning smile and added, "you can now buy any document you need, as long as you know the right person and have enough zloty to pay for it."

"How much would it cost?" Giulio asked promptly.

"I believe that this kind of a document would cost about three thousand zloty," he replied, "because there are several people that need to be paid. The most expensive of them is the one that puts an official seal on it."

All excited, Giulio exclaimed, "It is the best solution next to the real thing! After all, we will be cheating only the arbitrary and unjust rule made by the Soviet authorities. Nobody will be harmed by it." Rufin understood that his proposal was accepted.

Then Giulio said to me in French, "Tomorrow this is the price that I will ask for the jeweler's lathe."

"It is too much," I said, "he will never pay you that kind of money."

With a very convincing expression on his face, Giulio answered, "I believe that he will."

"Why are you so sure?" I asked him.

"Well," he said, "do you remember what else we found on that barge?"

"The engagement and the wedding rings," I answered and asked, "What does that have to do with the price of the lathe?"

"Do you remember that I told you at that time that it was 'chance, destiny or the will of God' that we found those rings?"

"Yes," I answered waiting further explanation.

"Well, at the same place and at the same time we found the jeweler's lathe. Yesterday I found that the jeweler was interested in buying it. Today Rufin has an answer to our problem to buy a certificate of marriage and he tells me the price. Don't you see how it all fits together? It should be 'chance, destiny, or the will of God!'" he tried to convince me.

Neither Rufin, nor Lidia could understand all our long conversation in French, and I had to recount to them the whole story<sup>6</sup> about what had happened to us. Rufin and Lidia were so impressed with all the coincidences that happened to us: the arrival of Giulio to be with me in our apartment at the exact day before the Germans evacuated the camp; our finding the engagement ring and the wedding rings, and the lathe on the barge; the snapped rope that prevented us from going to Czestochowa; my mother and I being drafted as interpreters in the NKVD camp, and because of that, not being included in the census with the rest of the Soviet citizens for deportation to the Soviet Union. And now, our encountering Rufin and having an item that could be sold to pay for the certificate of marriage document. Both Rufin and Lidia, being very devoted Catholics, concluded, "It's, indeed, the will of God! Too many coincidences cannot happen only by chance alone."

Lidia prepared a good hearty dinner. After dinner she served the ersatz coffee with cookies. And all that time the conversation was never centered on food. They were asking us to repeat or to add some details to our story like it was some kind of a miracle that fascinated them. Finally, Rufin said, "It is almost unbelievable how all the events are fitting together like the links on a chain. I believe that I am the next link on that chain. I am so convinced that Giulio will sell that lathe for the three thousand zloty that I will just go ahead and contact my colleagues to prepare the certificate of marriage." Lidia was nodding her head in a sign of approval.

I wanted to tell him to wait until Giulio had the money. I was afraid what would happen if he could not get that price from the jeweler. Where then we would get so much money? But the consensus of Lidia with her husband's decision put me at ease. I thought, "If they can accept the risk, I can accept it too."

Rufin asked us to give him our documents and he copied all the information that was needed to fill in the standard form for this document. The last information he asked, "What date you want to have on your certificate of marriage?" And he specified, "It had to be after the date that the Polish took over the government." Giulio and I agreed on March 17, 1945. When Rufin finished writing, we saw that it was time for us to leave to catch the last train home.

In saying "good-bye" we finally acknowledged Lidia's cooking skills by complimenting her on a delicious dinner. Rufin came with us to the streetcar stop and promised to have our document ready for the next Saturday and invited us to come again the next Saturday and to stay with them overnight and Sunday, which we accepted.

During the trip home Giulio's excitement was so contagious that I also began to believe that it was already a sure thing that we would have this long-sought certificate of marriage.

Giulio reasoned, "We know that we were married on the twenty-fifth of January nineteen-forty-five, the day when we found the wedding rings on the barge. Who cares if this marriage certificate Rufin will buy for us is a fake, as long as it serves our purpose of obtaining a visa for you as my wife to enter Italy. With the confusion of all the people returning home after the war, nobody will check it anyway. In Italy we will get married right away in the church, just to have our marriage legally registered to be in compliance with all the legal civil laws and for the legitimacy of our child."

When Giulio and I entered our apartment, we were both beaming with joy. "I can tell," said my mother, "that you had a very good time at your friend's home. You both look so happy."

"Yes, Mama!" we answered together.

"We also have a very good news," said Giulio. "Lala, tell it to Mama in Russian so it will be easier for her to understand."

I simplified it to one sentence, "Rufin will buy us a certificate of marriage."

My mother looked at me, then at Giulio, with a puzzled expression on her face. We understood that I had oversimplified too much and that she needed more details to understand it. After I told her all the details and she finally grasped that it was a fake document, she said, "But it is not a legal document. What will happen if the authorities check it?"

"*Maman*," replied Giulio calmly, "we will not show it to the Soviet authorities and not even to the Polish authorities. We will go to Prague in Czechoslovakia to the Italian consulate. How can they check it with the small town of Zabrze at this time when there is no telephone communications or mail service between these countries?" And he added with confidence, "As long as there is an official seal on the document, nobody would question its authenticity."

My mother was more reassured by Giulio's confidence, than by his reasoning. Then she suddenly asked, "How much will it cost you?"

Giulio and I looked at each other, trying silently to agree who would give her the answer. I pointed a finger at him, "You tell her."

Giulio began very cleverly without shocking her right away with the price, "You remember when I brought home that little machine from the barge and you asked me what I would do with it? Well, you should also remember that the last time we were at the jeweler, he told me that he was interested in buying it. That money will pay for the document."

"How much money?" insisted my mother.

I answered calmly, "Three thousand zloty."

"Three thousand zloty?! Are you serious?" she asked in disbelief and looking at Giulio said with indignation, "Your friend is a swindler! He enticed you to come to visit him and is using you to make a profit! Have you tried to bargain with him?"

We waited until she expressed her righteous anger at the exorbitant price. Then Giulio calmly told her, "Rufin is not making any money on it. He knows people that can make any fake document and he knows that this is the price they are asking. It takes more than one person to do it and all of them need to be paid. He offered us the only

solution to our problem. You should be happy that he is helping us, instead of accusing him."

My mother was still suspicious about the deal, but gave up arguing. Then she asked, "Are you sure that the jeweler will pay you so much for that machine?"

"I am sure that he knows how much it costs, and it is definitely more than three thousand zloty."

"Then you should ask much more for it and let the jeweler bargain, going down in price little by little," my mother suggested drawing on her experience on the market.

"Of course," Giulio agreed, "don't you worry, I have learned from you how to bargain."

Giulio collected all the auxiliary parts to the lathe and placed them in his military backpack. Then I helped him wrap the lathe in a soft blanket and tie it with cord. Giulio went in the cellar and brought up the cart he made to haul the items to the market when we used to walk on the country road to Gleiwitz.

"We are lucky that we can travel now by train from Laband," I commented. Giulio tied the package to the cart with the cord; then he caressed the package by stroking it gently and said, "Here is the payment for our certificate of marriage."

The next day when we arrived to the jeweler, he carefully inspected the jeweler's lathe and all the accessories. He said that he couldn't find one accessory that was important. Giulio told him that he didn't have it. But he added that he knew how to work on this kind of machine, and that it was in good working condition, and that the missing accessory was not essential, but needed only for some specific type of work.

Then they began to bargain for the price with me translating some of their comments, except the price, which they both understood in Polish. Giulio asked for five thousand zloty and the jeweler told him to go away and find another place to sell it.

"How much are you willing to pay for it?" asked Giulio patiently.

"Two thousand five hundred zloty," answered jeweler.

"You know very well that it cost much more then that!" Giulio replied and conceded, "Four thousand zloty."

"No, no. It's too far from my offer," the jeweler said.

"Listen," said Giulio in a conciliatory manner, "I can go down to three thousand five hundred zloty and no more. You know that it is a bargain for you. But we need that much money to go to Prague to the Italian consulate."

The jeweler complained again about the missing accessory. But Giulio didn't answer and was waiting to hear another offer. There was a pause in the bargaining. The jeweler probably felt that Giulio was serious with the last price and said, "Three thousand two hundred zloty and, if you are serious that you are going to Prague, I will give you some extra in Czech money for the watch springs. They will be handy to have when you are there."

Giulio said, "Agreed!"

They shook hands. The jeweler went in the store's back room and in a few minutes returned with the money. Giulio gave the money to me to put in my pocketbook and then said to the jeweler, "Thank you very much."

And the jeweler said, "Have a good trip to Prague!"

We both thanked him again, and saluted in Polish.

We went to the market and since we hadn't brought anything to sell, Giulio

decided he would look for a camera. "Last week your mother told me to buy one and I wanted to buy one for a long time. But I never was able to find a good one. Today I have plenty of time to look." Indeed he had good luck and found a German-made camera with a very good lens; in addition, it also had one roll of new film in it. He bought it right away as a reward for a good deal with the jeweler. Giulio also found a bottle of wine to bring to Rufin when we went to stay with them for the weekend.

We returned home happy with the three thousand zloty that we needed for the certificate of marriage and the camera ready to take pictures. My mother congratulated Giulio on his excellent bargaining skills.

The next Saturday afternoon Giulio and I traveled again to visit Rufin and Lidia in Michalkowice. We arrived there early in the evening and they were waiting for us to have supper together.

The first thing Giulio said to Rufin, "We have the three thousand zloty. Did you get the document?" Rufin pulled an envelope out of a drawer and gave it to Giulio, who immediately opened it and we inspected it together. It was a standard certificate of marriage with the date of registration of marriage on March 17, 1945 between Giulio Verro and Olga Gladka<sup>7</sup> in the Office of the Civil Status of the Town of Zabrze, Poland. It had a proper office seal and all the signatures that were required on the official legal document. Giulio gave Rufin the three thousand zloty and they shook hands to complete the transaction.

Giulio embraced me and said, "Now we only have to find out how we can go to Prague to the Italian consulate."

Rufin warned us, "You should not use this document anywhere in Poland; especially do not show it to the Soviet authorities, or to the NKVD agents in the camp where Olga is working, because it could be easily traced and found not to be registered in the Town Hall of Zabrze. Then you and all the people involved in making this document would be in big trouble." We promised that we would be very careful.

During supper and the rest of the evening we were all in a very good mood and our conversation was flowing, helped by the little wine that we had with our meal as a toast for a successful transaction and for good luck for Giulio and me when we got to Prague.

Lidia and Rufin were happy that he made it possible for us to have hope to remain together and, they especially rejoiced that maybe our child could be fortunate to have both a mother and father. Lidia said with envy in her voice, "You don't know how lucky you are to be blessed with a child right away." Then she paused for a while and, looking at Rufin with sorrowful eyes as if she was asking for his forgiveness, she confided, "When we got married, we wanted so much to have children. But in our ten years of marriage I have not been able to have a child. It has been such a disappointment for both of us." Rufin didn't want to dwell on this topic and changed the conversation to something else.

As we talked about how to arrange our trip on the train to Prague, Rufin told us, "You probably can't do it immediately because you need to have a visa to cross the border. This is not possible now because there is no Czechoslovakian consulate yet in Poland."

"I am registered with the Polish Red Cross for the repatriation of the Italian prisoners of war," said Giulio. Then he asked Rufin's advice, "Do you think that I can use

this marriage certificate to register Olga as my wife with the Red Cross?"

"Of course," replied Rufin. "The Red Cross is not a governmental organization and I don't think that they would check on the authenticity of the document. However," he warned, "don't give them the certificate to keep; just show it to them, and only if they ask for it. And, most important, don't tell them that she is from the Soviet Union because they could also have restrictions imposed on them by the Soviet authorities."

Giulio said, "We may easily say that she is French, since that's the language we speak together."

"You know," reflected Rufin, "traveling under the Red Cross supervision with a large group of Italian prisoners of war is the best solution for you because you probably will not need to have individual visas." Then he added, "When you go to register Olga at the Red Cross office, it would help to bring several packages of cigarettes as a gift for the Red Cross employees."

After hearing about the advantages of the Red Cross, I commented, "The Red Cross would probably accept me as Giulio's wife for the repatriation. But, if at the border I am asked to show my documents, it will be impossible to conceal that I am a Soviet citizen."

"Czechoslovakians would not check the Red Cross train," commented Rufin with confidence. "That's why I said that this is the best solution for you to travel with the Red Cross."

"Stop worrying," Giulio calmed me, "that's not the biggest problem. So far everything is going well. We shall find out how to solve it when we need to."

Then he expressed his worry, "I only hope that the Red Cross will repatriate us before the month of November when we expect the baby to be born. It would be much safer than traveling with a small baby, especially in the cold weather. Besides, I would prefer that the child be born in Italy after we have our church wedding."

Lidia, who until that time was listening quietly, suggested in her pleasant gentle voice, "Tomorrow morning, when we go to church, we all shall pray to God to assist you in reaching your destination safely." Then she added, "It's time to go to sleep if we want to get up in time for the early morning service."

Rufin and Lidia had a huge king-size bed that occupied almost half of the bedroom space. Lidia told me that she and I would undress first and climb into the middle of the bed on the fluffy feather mattress, and then Rufin and Giulio would join us on the two opposite sides. And that how all four of us slept in one bed that night. There was plenty of room, but I cuddled close to Giulio as I was used to doing in our narrow bunk bed.

The next morning Giulio woke me up with a kiss, "Good morning, Sleepyhead, it's time to get up. The bathroom is all yours. Everybody is already dressed and waiting for you to go to church. Rufin and I are outside and Lidia is setting the table for the breakfast that we will have when we return from the church."

In my ignorance of the Catholic church customs I asked, "Is it so late that we cannot have a breakfast before going to church?"

"No, silly girl," answered Giulio shaking his head, "it's because Lidia and Rufin cannot eat before having communion."

Then I asked another silly question, "Will you have communion too?"

"No," Giulio patiently explained, "I cannot have it because I didn't go for

confession yesterday."

I concluded in resignation, "How complicated are your Catholic church rules."

We found the church packed with people. There were no benches to sit on and most of the people were praying kneeling on the hard floor. The Mass was in Latin and Giulio could participate in it because he knew when to cross himself and when to say "Amen." I was trying to cross myself after him, but I was making my crosses from right to left according to the Orthodox custom. When we exited from the church, Lidia introduced us to her parents, who invited us to visit them that afternoon.

On our way home, Giulio told Rufin, "Polish are very devoted Catholics, much more than the Italians. I never saw so many people kneeling on the floor and praying so fierily in our churches." And he asked, "I am curious if it was always like this, or is it because the people are thankful that the war is over?"

"The Polish are very religious people," answered Rufin, "they were praying like this before the war, during the war, and now that the war has ended."

"I think," Giulio explained, "that many Italians feel anti-church and anti-priests because Italy was dominated for so many years by the Vatican."

After the hearty breakfast Giulio and Rufin went for a walk and Lidia and I remained in the kitchen. While I helped her with the dishes and she busied herself preparing Sunday dinner, we had plenty of time to talk.

She complained to me, "Rufin is very unhappy that we cannot have children. All my prayers and the candles that I have placed in the church, and even our pilgrimage to the Madonna of Czestochowa asking her for a miracle didn't help." And she told me again, "How fortunate you and Giulio are to have a baby. I am so glad that Rufin had an opportunity to get you the certificate of marriage. It should help you to remain together and to take care of your child."

I replied, "Giulio and I are so grateful to Rufin that there are no words to express it."

"Well," said Lidia, "Rufin told me so many nice things about Giulio and his friend Bruno when they worked together at the *Presswerke* in Laband. He respected them very much. He would have helped Giulio in any way he could. But when he found out that you were expecting a baby and the Soviets would not allow you to get married, he didn't hesitate to take a risk in getting the document for you."

"Can you believe," I told her wondering myself, "that it was by pure chance that we saw Rufin at the streetcar stop only one week ago?"

"Maybe it was not chance," said Lidia. "Maybe it was providence that guided you and him to be at the same time at the same place."

"Yes," I answered, "when it is hard to explain something by chance alone, one begins to believe in providence."

Giulio and Rufin were out walking for a long time and Lidia and I had a chance to get to know each other by sharing our thoughts and concerns.

"How long will you be working for the NKVD camp?" Lidia asked.

"I am afraid that it will not be for long," I replied. "Lately we are asked to work only once or twice a week and even then the number of German men is so small that in a few hours we are done registering them. My mother and Giulio are going to the market in Katowitz two to three times a week. My mother has learned the Polish market lingo and has become very skillful in buying and reselling all kinds of items and in bartering them

for food. She also receives orders from the NKVD doctor, doctor's assistant, and other NKVD officers to sell or buy some items and food."

I didn't tell her that they gave her the gold coin to sell, but explained that they also asked her to buy some items they wanted to take home as presents or for themselves.

"She became a real businesswoman," Lidia concluded.

I replied, "Yes, you can call her that. The most important thing is that until now she and Giulio have managed to provide us with good food and have kept the NKVD officers happy."

I suddenly thought about the departure to Prague and said, "But now we have the problem of how to keep my mother from being returned to the Soviet Union. Giulio cannot register my mother with the Red Cross to be repatriated with the Italian prisoners of war. Nobody would risk, including the Red Cross, to list a Soviet citizen because she has only a Soviet passport and a German identification card where it is stated that she is from the Soviet Union. We will be lucky if they agree to register me as a wife. It will be difficult for Giulio to smuggle one woman. But two women would attract too much suspicion and then neither of us would have a chance.

"We need to find my mother some place to stay until the Soviet troops leave Poland and no longer impose their orders on the Polish government. She speaks perfect French and could always pass for a French woman who lost her documents. Once normal life begins, she may join my father, if he was able to get out of the Soviet occupied part of Germany; or we could take her to live with us in Italy."

Lidia consoled me, "You found a solution for you and Giulio, which was the most difficult problem. It shall be much easier to find a place for your mother to stay. Let me talk to Rufin and to my parents about this."

By the time Lidia finished preparing dinner and I helped her set the table, Giulio and Rufin returned from their walk. We had a rich dinner for those times, chicken and potatoes baked in the oven, some dessert, and ersatz coffee. During dinner Lidia told Rufin about my concern of leaving my mother behind in Poland. As they talked in Polish, I understood that she was suggesting to her husband to offer their hospitality to my mother.

He didn't express any concern about hiding a Soviet citizen. Rufin's main worry instead was her upkeep. It was a justified and important matter in those difficult economic times having one more mouth to feed. Lidia explained to him what I told her about my mother's marketing experience and she was able to convince him that my mother was capable of providing for herself by trafficking on the market in Katowitz.

Rufin asked me some questions in German about my mother's buying, selling, and bartering abilities and about her knowledge of French. Being satisfied with my answers, he said to me, "Lidia and I decided we would be glad to let your mother stay with us when you and Giulio are able to leave for Prague."

For Giulio it was a complete surprise to hear this offer from Rufin, since I hadn't yet had a chance to tell him about sharing my concern of leaving my mother in Poland with Lidia. He was overwhelmed with the generosity of his friend and his wife and asked them, "How could we recompense for all that you have done for us?"

"Giulio, providence has led you to us," Rufin replied. "It seems that it was meant for us to be one of the links in the chain of events in your life."

Giulio and I looked at each other and had to agree with Rufin's conclusion.

After dinner we went to visit Lidia's parents. They were very friendly and pleasant people and offered us ersatz coffee. They had a large garden where they grew vegetables. Part of the garden had high rose bushes full of blossoms that emitted a sweet scent. Rufin had a camera, which he had bartered from Giulio during the time he was a prisoner of war. And Giulio had purchased a camera the week before on the market. Both made pictures of all of us in the garden to remember that important day in our lives.

Before we left, Rufin also gave us the address where he worked, so we could contact him quicker when the time came for us to depart for Prague. "As soon as your mother is ready to leave," he said, "she should notify me and I will come and take her to our home."

Both Lidia and Rufin accompanied us to the streetcar stop. "You should visit us again," said Lidia before we boarded the streetcar. We promised her to come to say "good-bye" before we left Poland.

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1. This story was recounted so many times to so many people that many details remain vividly in memory.

2. See the chapter "Deportation of Soviet Citizens by the NKVD."

3. See the chapters "The NKVD Camp in Laband" and "The Trip to the Soviet Consulate in Warsaw."

4. See the chapter "Chance, Destiny, or the Will of God."

5. See the chapter "Trip to the Soviet Consulate in Warsaw."

6. See the chapters "The Prince of My Dreams," "Chance, Destiny, or the Will of God," "The Snapped Rope," "The NKVD Camp in Laband," "Giulio's Watch," "The Trip to the Soviet Consulate in Warsaw," and "Deportation of the Soviet Citizens by the NKVD."

7. Polish spelling of the feminine name Gladky.

## Last Day Of Work At the NKVD Camp

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

One day at the beginning of September 1945 Captain Komov called my mother and me into his office and told us, "Today is your last day of work here. There will be no more German men processed in this camp<sup>1</sup> and we don't need the interpreters anymore. Please return your NKVD camp passes." And with an apologetic expression on his face added, "I am sorry to tell you this, but starting tomorrow you cannot come here to receive your food rations."

As we were returning our passes, Captain Komov told us, "My work here is also finished and very soon I will be going back home." He saluted my mother and me by shaking our hands, and sincerely said, "Good-bye, my friends. I appreciated your help with my work here very much. It was a real pleasure meeting your nice family." Then he looked at me and said, "Olga, I know that you and Giulio are waiting to go to Prague to clear up your mixed nationality marriage situation with the Soviet and the Italian Consulates.<sup>2</sup> I wish you and Giulio the very best when you go there."

"Thank you very much for your good wishes, Captain Komov." I replied. "I hope

that the trains will begin to go to Prague very soon."

And my mother said, "We were very pleased to work with such a good person as you. You treated us as equals and not as inferiors. We wish you a good journey home."

A few days later *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov came to our apartment in the evening and asked me to call our neighbors, the Izsorskis. When they came, *Podpolkovnik* told us, "This house is very close to the camp gate; we need it for use by the camp guards, so both of your families have to move to another place to live."

Mister Izsorski was very surprised to hear the news, but my mother and I had anticipated this, because we were no longer working in the camp.

*Podpolkovnik* ordered Mister Izsorski, "You are the interpreter for the Soviet Army unit in Laband and are in contact every day with the Polish Town Government Office. It will be easy for you to find new apartments for both families. You should do this as soon as possible."

Indeed, Mister Izsorski very quickly found an empty two-story house with two apartments and we and his family immediately moved there. His family occupied the first floor apartment, which had three rooms and a kitchen, and we moved into the second floor apartment, which had two rooms and a kitchen. There was only one bathroom off the first floor entrance hall near the stairs to the second floor, and both families had to share it. There was a small courtyard with a storage shed for coal and wood. In the back of the house there were a few young prune trees that had some small fruit on their thin branches.

Giulio again had to use the cart to transport all our belongings and the furniture that we found in the last apartment. As he was moving the wardrobe he found several black leather skins on top that were of the grade to be used for making shoes or boots. Giulio decided to also transport the coal that he had moved already twice before, from our neighbors' cellar to ours in the hamlet's apartment, and then to the cellar in the apartment near the camp. But he believed that it needed to be done since we didn't know if we would be still in Laband in the cold month of November when we expected our baby to be born.

About a week after we moved to the new place, my mother, Giulio, and I were returning from the market in Katowitz and walking home from the railroad station. Suddenly a car coming in the opposite direction stopped near us and Captain Komov got out and came toward us, leaving the car door open.

"Finally, I am going home!" he said all excited, which was very unusual for his calm demeanor we were used to seeing at the NKVD camp. "I am in a hurry to catch the train, but as I saw you, I asked the driver to stop because I wanted to say my last good-bye and wish your fine family all the best for the future. It was a real privilege knowing you." He gave each of us a long and warm handshake and quickly returned to the car. As he was entering the car, we wished him a good journey.

Impressed with his gesture of cordiality, my mother commented, "He really respected us; otherwise, he would not have stopped to say good-bye to us when he was in such a big hurry."

After we settled down in the new apartment, my mother and Giulio had to go to the market in Katowitz several times a week to provide food for us since we didn't receive provisions from the NKVD camp kitchen anymore. Lyudmila Larionovna, the doctor from the NKVD camp, visited us when she needed some fresh food and other

items from the market. She was also giving my mother gold German coins, one at a time, to be bartered for gold jewelry with the jeweler in Katowitz. When she came to the apartment, she was monitoring my pregnancy and reassured me that when the time came she would assist me with the childbirth.

She told us that several new NKVD officers had arrived in the camp, one of them had a rank of *Polkovnik*; he was taking the place of *Polkovnik* Stepanov, who had been transferred to another NKVD unit. She complained, "We had such a good team of officers before, but things are changing for the worse. The new *Polkovnik* is introducing new, stricter rules in the camp and his officers are treating everybody in a very formal way. *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov told me that there will be many changes in what the new NKVD unit will be doing now and that I should behave very carefully with this 'new crowd,' which he called 'another breed of the NKVD agents.'"

She didn't explain to us what kind of changes would be going on, but she warned us, "Please, from now on, when you bring me merchandise from the market don't come to the gate to ask the guard to call me from the dispensary. I will come here to your place myself to pick it up. This way it will be safer for you and me."

Soon it became obvious that this NKVD camp has been transformed into a camp for Soviet citizens who, probably like us, were in Germany as *Ostarbeitern*. For some unknown reason, at first only the men were brought in; there were no women. My mother and I were concerned that my father and uncle Igor could be among the new detainees, if they were not able to avoid being captured by the NKVD. We decided that we could go near the camp to collect sorrel leaves growing along the camp fence. We reasoned, "If they are there, they certainly would try to look outside the fence to find out if there was somebody they knew from the hamlet or from the *Presswerke* Laband and to ask something about their families."

One day, when we were collecting sorrel, one young man called to my mother in Russian, "Aunty, Aunty, listen, do you remember us?"

My mother told me, "Don't show them that you understand Russian and don't answer. Look inconspicuous. Do you recognize any of them? Maybe they are from the Oelsnitz *Ostarbeitern* camp and remember us."

"No, I never saw them before," I replied "but I am scared. If they know us, they may tell somebody in the camp that we were also *Ostarbeitern*. Anything could happen with the new officers in the camp who don't know us. They may just grab us too. Let's get out of here quickly."

My idea to ask Lyudmila Larionovna to see if our men were in the camp was categorically dismissed by my mother, "We never mentioned to anybody in the NKVD camp that your father ran away from the advancing Soviet Army. It is too risky to do it now."

From then on, when we tried to see if our men were there, we kept ourselves far from the fence and close to the hamlet apartment buildings. But there was no sign of them and after a while we stopped going there.

My mother and Giulio continued to go to the market in Katowitz and I remained home because Giulio didn't want me to get tired in the last months of pregnancy. One day in the middle of September when they had gone to the market, I was sitting on the steps of the house enjoying the nice warm autumn day. A young Soviet soldier arrived at the house on a bicycle and saluted me in Russian, "Good day!"

"Good day," I answered in Russian. There was nothing suspicious about Soviet soldiers coming occasionally to see our neighbor Izsorski, who was the interpreter for the Soviet Army unit in Laband.

The soldier said, "I am looking for a young Russian girl that lives here. Is that you?"

I got scared, thinking he had come to take me to the NKVD camp. I answered quickly, "I am not Russian, I am Ukrainian. And I am not a young girl, I am a married woman."

The soldier barely took notice of what I told him. He climbed the steps, sat next to me, and right away tried to embrace me. I moved away from him. "Come on, don't be so bashful," he said, looking at me like a cat who had found an open jar with sour cream. A strong smell of alcohol from his breath warned me that he was drunk. At that moment I decided that it was safer for me to be outside than to run in the house where he could follow me. And I rushed down the steps to the courtyard.

"Hey, hey! Where you are running?" the soldier called, following me, and he added in a sweet voice, "I only want to make love to you."

I went to the middle of the courtyard where *Madame* Izsorski could see and hear me from her kitchen window, and said in a loud voice, "I am going to call my husband." And then warned him, "You better leave me alone. Don't you see that I am pregnant?"

The last words had an immediate effect on him. He stopped and looked at me as if he was trying to determine if I was telling the truth. Then he uttered several Russian swear phrases and continued to curse as he returned to his bicycle and pedaled away.

I ran upstairs quickly into our apartment and locked the door, just in case he changed his mind. I didn't come out of the house until my mother and Giulio returned home from the market. When I told them about the incident with the Red Army soldier, they both became very upset and started to give me their suggestions on what I should and shouldn't do when they were not home. But most of all, my mother was upset that *Madame* Izsorski didn't come out to help me.

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1. See the chapter "The NKVD Camp in Laband."

2. See the chapter "The Trip to the Soviet Consulate in Warsaw."

## News About Red Cross Convoy

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and Giulio Verro

My mother and Giulio usually went to the market in Katowitz on Tuesdays, when Giulio could meet the other Italians. One week my mother was not feeling well and on that day they decided not to go. But that evening Giulio suddenly told me, "Tomorrow morning I will go alone to Katowitz to find out if the Italians have heard any news about repatriation."

On Wednesday morning I was still asleep when Giulio kissed me good-bye and said, "Don't get up, it's very early. And don't worry if I return late."

Later that morning two Polish policemen knocked at our door and ordered my

mother and me to follow them to the newly opened Polish police station where they brought many other people of various nationalities. Several policemen were checking documents and ordering all foreigners to leave Poland and go home to their countries. Most foreigners' reason for remaining in Laband was that they didn't know how to get home—there was no place where they could receive information on how to do it. The police officers were directing them to go to the Red Cross office in Katowitz or to their consulates in Warsaw, which were responsible for the repatriation of their citizens.

When our turn came almost at the end of the day, I explained to the policeman, "My husband is an Italian prisoner of war. We have already been to Warsaw and today he went to the Red Cross in Katowitz to find out when the Italians will be repatriated." It seemed that the policeman was satisfied with my answer and he said to just wait for further instructions.

After giving all the foreigners a warning to return to their fatherland, the police released everybody. It was clear that they wanted to scare us, but that they didn't yet have any authority to force anybody out of Poland, because the Soviets were still in charge.

When Giulio returned that afternoon, he was all smiles and, before saying the usual Italian greeting "ciao" and giving me a kiss, he handed me a small postcard-size paper and said, "Can you read this?"

It was a Polish Red Cross registration card written in Polish and I read the first line, "Verro Giulio and wife Olga, born 1923." Surprised, I looked at him and asked, "You didn't have our certificate of marriage with you. How did you register me as your wife?"

Giulio smiled and said, "Four packs of cigarettes, as Rufin had suggested. I tried, and it worked, but they asked me if I had the certificate of marriage, which will be needed for the Italian consulate in Prague; and I told them that I had it at home."

I read the rest of the document stating Giulio's vital statistics, "Born: 22-XII-1915 in Pisa. Nationality: Italian. Place of residence: Prisoner's No. 14477; Lager IV. Departing for: Czechoslovakia and Italy. Registered by the Polish Red Cross in Katowitz. Day 19-IX-1945." It had a seal of the Polish Red Cross and a signature by the bureau director. And there was an additional note: "Given as a pass through the border."<sup>1</sup>

As I was reading it, Giulio was holding me close to him. "Was it that simple?" I asked.

"Yes, it was. The important thing they told me was to come to their office often and to keep in touch with the other Italians, because they had already registered enough Italians and expected to have the repatriation convoy train ready to depart very soon."

We told Giulio how the Polish policemen had taken us to the Polish police station where there were many other foreigners and that they had warned us all to leave Poland.

"They want to get rid of us," said Giulio. "You know, it is a burden to feed all these people."

"Most of all they want to take over our apartments," I clarified.

"We better start this week to bring to the market and sell all those items that we cannot take with us," Giulio said.

"I better start tomorrow to sort out what clothes we will take with us," I added and suggested that we go to bed early because we were exhausted emotionally from all that had happened that day.

From the time Giulio registered both of us with the Red Cross, my mother and

Giulio were very busy selling at the market all that stuff that we couldn't take with us. Giulio went to the Red Cross office several times, but there was no news about the departure.

One day a Polish man came to see us in our apartment. He presented himself as an employee of the Laband Town Hall. He said that they needed our apartment for a Polish family and that we had to move from there as soon as possible. He explained that as foreigners we had no right to occupy property that was abandoned by a German family and now belonged to the town. He didn't tell us the exact date we had to leave.

We suspected, but my mother was convinced, that this visit was prompted by our neighbor Izsorski, who was living on the first floor. His wife, *Madame* Izsorski, complained many times that they were crowded in their apartment. Every time she mentioned that, she would say, "When you leave, we will take over the upper story to have bedrooms for each member of our family."

They knew that Giulio and I were waiting to go to Prague, but they were probably losing their patience, not knowing when it would happen. But, most of all, Mister Izsorski was counting on our vulnerability after our work at the NKVD camp had finished and we didn't have their protection anymore. Besides that, he knew that the Soviet citizens from the hamlet had already been deported and now Soviet men were gathered in the NKVD camp. Since we were not moving from the apartment, he probably decided to put on some pressure to speed up our departure.

After this happened, my mother insisted, "Don't tell the Izsorskis about the Town Hall employee's visit and his request that we move from the apartment and especially about the repatriation of the Italians. Don't show them that we are upset about something; behave cheerfully, as if nothing has happened. Let them guess what our plans are and let them worry about what we are going to do next."

After that we tried not to encounter them and, when it was unavoidable, we limited ourselves to saying only "Hello" and "How are you?" instead of stopping to chat as we had done before all this happened.

This was especially hard for Giulio, who until now behaved as a real gentleman with *Madam* Izsorski and their pretty young daughter Aileen. What helped him to overcome this uneasiness was that all members of the Izsorski family behaved somewhat abashedly and also avoided talking to us. My mother concluded, "There is no question, it is them who are trying to get us out of the apartment."

We knew that we needed to do something about this situation. Besides, the month of November, when the baby would be born, was not far off. And Giulio was concerned about traveling with the newborn baby during the cold weather. On the thirtieth of September, I remember that it was on Sunday, Giulio decided to go to Katowitz again to meet with the Italians and to hear the news about the repatriation.

I was surprised to see him when he returned very early in the afternoon and asked him. "What happened? Didn't you find any Italians that you cared to talk to?"

Giulio hesitated for a few seconds and then said very cautiously, "We were lucky that I went to Katowitz today, because the Red Cross convoy train leaves tomorrow morning from Katowitz station."

"Tomorrow morning?!" My mother and I exclaimed together.

"Yes," said Giulio calmly. "We have plenty of time to get ready; we have this afternoon, the whole evening and, if necessary, the whole night."

After the news settled in my mind, I suddenly realized that nothing had been said about what to do about my mother and I complained, "We don't have time to move my mother to Rufin's house, not even time to notify him that we are leaving."

Giulio answered again very calmly, as if he had already anticipated my reaction and had rehearsed his answer, "Your mother speaks Polish, she has Rufin's home address, and she knows that he is working in the Town Hall in Zabrze. All she has to do is travel to Katowitz, which she does every week; from there she can take the streetcar to Zabrze, where she can find him any time on workdays. Rufin told you that he would come and help her with her luggage, if necessary."

Giulio spoke in a monologue, not giving me a chance to interrupt him. Then he looked at my mother and asked, "Do you think you can find Rufin?"

My mother was overwhelmed by all this rush of events and looked somewhat confused, but she replied, "I hope I can."

"Of course you can!" encouraged Giulio. And all three of us began to busy ourselves getting ready for our departure.

Knowing that one day we would have to leave Laband, Giulio had bought two used but sturdy suitcases at the market. In one of them I had already placed all layette for the baby and the best pieces of lingerie for me. All I had to pack in the second suitcase were my fall and winter clothes, some of which we had recently bought at the market. Giulio packed all his clothes in his military backpack and rolled up his military wool blanket, which he attached on top of the pack.

My mother urged me to take a few pieces of fabric that we had bought at the market and a piece of wool intended for a suit for my father, which we had brought from home. She said, "You will need a new suit after the baby is born."

In addition, I took some new bed linen and towels that we had found in our neighbors' apartment. Giulio didn't want to have any additional luggage, only what he himself could carry. I had to carry only my large pocketbook with our documents and money and a large market bag with our toiletries and food for a few days of our journey. We were sure that the Red Cross would provide us with some food, but my mother insisted that we take with us as much as possible from what was in our kitchen.

We finished packing early in the evening and I sat with my mother checking to make sure she had all the documents and addresses in her handbag. We divided the money, leaving all the Polish zloty to my mother and taking with us Czechoslovakian currency. Then we decided to divide the *Deutschemarks*, which were not used in Poland anymore, just in case we needed them on our way through Austria.

My mother also gave me an old Russian five-ruble gold coin that was given to her when she was born by her grandfather Daniyl Berezhnoy, as he used to give to each of his grandchildren. "It should remain in the family," she said, giving it to me. "Cherish it as a family heirloom."

Until late in the evening my mother and I talked and talked about what could happen to us and to her. We were mostly trying to anticipate anything that could go wrong and how we could communicate with her in that case. Rufin's and Giulio's addresses were to be used to write as soon as the international mail began to function.

"Remember that Papa and Igor have the addresses for Giulio and Monsieur Demey," I said.

"If they were able to get out of Soviet-occupied Germany," remarked my mother,

“they should write to both addresses.

And I shall write right away to Monsieur Demey and give him my and the Rufins’ addresses.”

“Remember,” I added, “Zoya Litvinova has Monsieur Demey’s address too.”

My mother paused for a while and reminded me, “Lyalya, try to write to me from Prague and, of course, from Italy, as soon as you arrive there; maybe the mail is already functioning.”

“Remember, we will write to you only in French, or in German, and you should answer us in French. Absolutely don’t write in Russian!” I warned her. And we agreed in our letters to use the words “our cousins” to refer to the Soviets.

For a long time it had been clear that we could not take my mother with us to Italy, but now, at the moment of the departure, it suddenly became a reality. We were trying to cope with the imminent separation by accepting the fact that this was the only way that Giulio and I could have a chance to remain together and our child could have both a mother and a father.

My mother told me, “Soon you will become a mother. It is your responsibility to decide what is best for your child, as I am doing now what is best for you. Do you remember, when we had to make a decision to leave our home in Slavyansk, what my father, and your grandfather, said to us at parting? ‘Don’t think about me. I am an old man. I am at the end of my life. Your life is ahead of you. You must do what is best for you.’”

“Yes,” I answered, “I remember it well.”

“Now it is my time to say to you, ‘Do what is best for you and your child.’”

“But what will happen to you?” I asked. “How long can you hide from the Soviets in Poland? What will happen to you if they deport you back to the Soviet Union?”

Giulio, who was patiently allowing my mother and me to talk in Russian, finally interfered and said, “Let’s talk in French so I can understand it too. Maybe I can add my opinion to what you are talking about.”

I translated the main points of our conversation and he approved my mother’s reasoning and asked her, “Are you sure you can entrust your daughter to me?”

She looked at him and said, “Yes, I am more than sure. I am entrusting to you not only my daughter, but also my grandchild.”

Satisfied with her answer, Giulio said, “Now we should go to bed; we need to have a good rest, tomorrow will be a long day for all of us.”

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1. From the Polish Red Cross registration card.

## Repatriation Of Italian Prisoners Of War

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

On Monday, October 1, 1945, was a memorable day – Giulio and I were boarding the Red Cross convoy train repatriating the Italian prisoners of war. Giulio was excited

and I was happy and sad at the same time knowing that I was leaving my mother maybe forever. I was afraid about her future and felt guilty leaving her alone in all probability facing deportation to Soviet concentration camps. She busied herself in preparing breakfast for us for the last time and trying to attend to all last details before our departure but I felt her apprehension and resignation to our separation.

We got up early in the morning and left our apartment without saying good-bye to the Izsorski family. My mother said, "They were used to our early morning departures to the market and will not suspect anything right away. And I will not tell them anything until it becomes obvious that you are gone."

To make sure that no one would detect that I was a Soviet citizen and would not allow me to board the Red Cross train at the railroad station, we agreed to speak only French, absolutely no Russian. On our way from Laband to the station of Katowitz we began to practice. Also, Giulio and I agreed that it would be safer to tell the other Italians in the train that I was French, since I spoke with him in that language anyway.

Although we were sure that our separation was probably permanent, or at least for a very, very long time, during our last moments together neither my mother nor I were able to say anything important or memorable. My mother was repeating to us, "Remember to write to me immediately from Prague and from Italy," and, "Notify me when the baby is born." Giulio and I were telling her to contact Rufin right away and were asking her to check to be sure she had his address in her pocketbook.

I reminded my mother, "Tell Lyudmila Larionovna that Giulio and I finally were able to go to Prague to the Soviet consulate, just in case the NKVD officers in the camp become suspicious about our disappearance. Don't mention to her that we are going to the Italian consulate there! And don't tell her that we departed on the Red Cross train repatriating the Italians!" Giulio was just shaking his head, listening to all the precautions.

He reassured me, "Once we are on the Red Cross convoy train, the NKVD agents will not chase after you."

When we arrived at the station in Katowitz a train with passenger cars was already there waiting. It was obvious that it was the Red Cross convoy train, because we could see Italian military uniforms everywhere. But what was threatening to us were the many Soviet Army soldiers with guns across their shoulders who were keeping the crowd of well-wishers seeing off their departing Italian friends under control. There were many people on the platform, mostly women, but they were not allowed to come close to the cars; near each car door was a Soviet Army soldier.

We stopped on the platform and I told Giulio, "While I am embracing and kissing my mother and saying 'good-bye,' you watch to see if the Soviet soldiers are checking documents."

"No," he said, "they are only standing next to the men wearing the Red Cross emblem on their sleeves. The Red Cross men are only checking the Red Cross registration cards. They are not asking for any other documents. I think that it is safe for us to board the train."

He embraced and kissed my mother and said in a very loud voice in French, "*Au revoir! Au revoir!*" And he walked slowly with the two suitcases and the backpack on his back toward the nearest car door. I kissed my mother again trying not to show much emotion, and followed Giulio, holding the Red Cross registration card in my hand.

Indeed, it was the Red Cross man who was in charge of checking the Red Cross registration cards and the Soviet soldier was there to see that nobody else got on that train. The Red Cross man took the card from me and read from it, "Giulio Verro." And pointing at Giulio, who was dressed in his Italian Air Force uniform, asked, "Are you Giulio Verro?"

"Yes," Giulio answered.

Then he read, "And *zona*<sup>1</sup> Olga." And pointing at me, he asked, "Are you *zona* Olga?"

"*Tak*."<sup>2</sup> I confirmed in Polish.

The Red Cross employee said, "Two more."

He wrote it on the piece of paper that he was holding in his hand. Then he looked at the Soviet soldier standing at the other side of the car door and said to him, "Documents are in order. Let them board the train."

The soldier nodded to us and said in Russian, "Climb up."

Giulio understood that we were cleared to board the train and he helped me to climb up first, pushed up the two suitcases, and then got up himself. We both emitted a sigh of relief after those few minutes of tension when our documents were checked.

The car was not full yet and we were able to find a place where from a passageway window we could see my mother standing on the platform. Giulio opened the window and I stood there for a long time mostly looking at her thin face and skinny figure standing all alone and waving her hand.

I could hear her, "*Au revoir! Ecrive moi!*"<sup>3</sup>

I would answer her, "*Oui, oui... Au revoir Maman...*"<sup>4</sup>

We didn't dare say anything that could raise suspicion in anyone. I could not cry, and was holding back my emotions for fear of attracting attention not only of the Soviet soldier standing close by, but also of the Italian men in the car. I felt that my heart was tied in a tight knot and once in a while I had to take a deep breath to feel it pumping. Giulio placed the luggage on the upper shelf and then opened another window. We both stood there looking at my mother, waving to her and repeating only, "*Au revoir Maman!*"

Then we saw that all the men in Italian uniforms had left the platform; the Red Cross men gathered together and seemingly were giving the count to their representative, who was probably responsible for the Red Cross convoy train. Then all car doors were finally closed and the soldiers ordered everybody standing on the platform to move back even farther. All began to wave their hands to the Italian men who were waving back from the open windows. One could hear in Polish, "*Do widzenia!*" and in Italian, "*Arrivederci!*" which both meant "Good-bye." There were a few very long minutes until the conductor gave a signal and the train began to move slowly.

I was trying to memorize the thin figure of my mother standing on the platform and waving to us as she slowly disappeared from my view.

Giulio closed the window, took my hand, and led me to sit on the bench. He embraced me gently and said, "I know how you feel. It is hard. But you shouldn't feel guilty for leaving your mother. You know that there was no other way to do it."

I didn't answer, but just nodded my head. Imprinted in my mind I could see the dimming out figure of my mother...

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1. "Wife" [in Polish].

2. "Yes" [in Polish].
3. Good-bye! Write to me! [in French].
4. Yes, yes... Good-bye, Mother... [in French].

## Red Cross Convoy Train to Prague

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

As the train slowly left the station in Katowitz it gradually began to increase the speed. Giulio was sitting close to me holding and caressing my hand to reassure me that we were together. Trying to cheer me up he said, "By the way, the soldiers didn't board the train; they all remained on the platform. For now you may stop worrying."

Only then I noticed that in our compartment there were two men in Italian military uniforms sitting on the opposite bench. They were smiling at us. Giulio introduced himself and introduced me as his wife. They told us their names and began to talk very fast in Italian with Giulio. I understood only that Giulio told them that I was French and that I didn't speak Italian.

I smiled and moved closer to the window to watch; it seemed that train was standing still and countryside was running away.

The Italian speech, most of which I didn't understand yet, sounded very harmonious, especially as it was accompanied with the rhythmic beat of the train. It produced a calming effect on me. I felt the baby giving me a couple of kicks and I thought, "The baby is reminding me that I have to think about him. That's what my mother said to me last night." And I was reassuring myself, "There was no other way to ensure the baby's right to have both a mother and a father. This was the only opportunity that could allow Giulio and me to remain together. A chance, destiny, or the will of God had created all these events that were favorable for us. If it weren't meant to be, we wouldn't be sitting here in this train on our way to Prague."

Giulio talked with the Italians for a while and then moved closer to me like he wanted to involve me in their conversation and told me in French, "Lala, both of these men were German prisoners of war; they worked on farms for German farmers." Then pointing at each man he told me their names and their hometowns in Italy. As he was telling me this, they smiled and bowed their heads slightly showing their pleasure in being introduced to me. I bowed my head also to each of them and smiled.

After this introduction, Giulio lowered his voice and said, "I took this opportunity to interrupt my conversation with them because they were becoming too nosy about me and you." He embraced me and continued to talk in French in a low tone of voice. The Italian men understood that we wanted to be left alone and one of them told Giulio that they would go look in the other compartments to see if they could find somebody they knew.

Early in the afternoon the train arrived at the Polish-Czechoslovakian border. We were expecting that the Czechoslovakian border guards would check the documents. However, before the train stopped, we could see from the windows a long line of Soviet

soldiers with guns across their shoulders waiting for the train to stop. Giulio said, "Uh-oh, look who will be checking our documents! You better pull out our Red Cross card from your pocketbook and give it to me. And you lie down on the bench and make believe you are sleeping. Remember, don't show them that you can understand Russian, and if you have to answer talk in French."

As soon as the train stopped, two Soviet soldiers jumped one in each door on opposite ends of the cars and began to check the documents. I could hear their loud requests in Russian: "*Documyenty!*" "*Documyenty!*"

I was lying on the bench with my face in the shadow of the little table attached under the window. Giulio sat in the space remaining near my feet. By the sound of their voices and tapping of their boots on the floor of the car I could hear that the soldiers were coming closer and closer to our compartment, and my heart was beating faster and faster from fear. Then I heard the steps toward our compartment and the request in a demanding tone of voice, "*Documyenty!*"

I sensed that Giulio was giving the soldier our Red Cross pass and heard him saying, probably pointing at me, "*Moya zhená.*"<sup>41</sup> The soldier pointed the flashlight on my face and kept the light there for several seconds probably to see if I was really asleep. The light penetrated through my closed eyelids and I had a hard time not blinking. Then he removed the light from my face and I felt Giulio taking my handbag and placing the Red Cross pass in it. When he put the bag back on the bench, he pressed gently with his fingers on my leg as a signal that everything was all right. And I felt how the flashlight moved away to the opposite side of the compartment.

"*Documyenty!*" demanded the soldier again, directing his order to the two Italian men. Then I heard his steps moving away and his voice in the next compartment, "*Documyenty!*"

But I didn't move or open my eyes until Giulio told me, "He is gone. You may sit up."

"Not yet," I whispered. "Let me know when the soldiers get out of the car. Then I will get up."

One of the Italians asked Giulio if I was afraid of the Soviet soldiers. "It was just a precaution," he answered. "You never know what kind of orders they may have regarding civilians traveling in the Red Cross convoy train repatriating the Italian prisoners of war." The man agreed with Giulio.

Then one of the Italians began to tell about his experiences with the Soviet soldiers. "As a prisoner of war I worked for a German farmer. When the Soviet Army occupied the region, the Soviet soldiers came to all the farms, took all the German men, and led them away. They never came back. The rumors were that they were taken to the Soviet Union to work.

My farmer and his wife treated me very well. When her husband didn't return home, I helped her plant the crop in the spring, to take care of the field in the summer, and did harvesting before departing. I was sorry to leave the farmer's wife, who couldn't take care of the farm without a man's help." And he added excusing himself, "But I have my family in Italy and want to return to my wife and children."

Giulio commented with the words of wisdom, "It is the rule of war, the conquerors have the right to do whatever they like with those whom they defeated." And he reinforced it with an example, "Germans did what they wanted with the Italians when

they took us as prisoners of war and deported us to Germany. Now comes their turn to be defeated."

I had opened my eyes and was listening to the conversation. I asked Giulio to translate what they talked about. He translated it and told me, "I didn't tell him that we know for sure that his farmer was indeed deported to the Soviet Union." Giulio got up, looked through the window, and said, "All soldiers are out. You can get up."

As he was helping me to get up, the Italian man who talked with Giulio before comforted me in Italian, "*Non avere paura. Tutto va bene, Signora.*"<sup>2</sup>

I understood the meaning and answered "*Grazie.*"<sup>3</sup>

Giulio and I sat close together and began talking in low voices in French. The talkative Italian understood that he was excluded from our private conversation.

"Well," said Giulio with the sigh of relief, "we have passed the second checkpoint. So far the Red Cross pass is recognized by the Soviet military authorities as a valid document for traveling on this train."

"But the Soviet military are in charge in Czechoslovakia too," I commented and expressed my fear about our next encounter with the authorities. "Let's hope that the Italian consulate in Prague will not request any permission to be obtained from the Soviet consulate."

"I think that our three-thousand-zloty certificate of marriage and your passport with your picture on it to verify your identity should be sufficient for the Italian consulate to give you a visa as my wife," Giulio answered very convincingly.

The train was moving slowly and we sat quietly admiring the countryside in its autumn beauty through the window. The two Italians went to talk with somebody in another compartment. Now that we finally were alone we decided to eat our sandwiches, relax, and talk in a normal tone of voice.

Toward evening when the dim light from the solitary light bulb on the ceiling was barely illuminating the compartment the two Italians accommodated themselves for the night; one climbed on the upper shelf and the other stretched himself on the bench below. Giulio untied his military blanket from his back-pack and laid it on the bench, leaving a space for him to sit near the window.

"You sleep here," he said, kissing me and wishing me good night. I took my sweater from the bag and rolled it to put under my head. Giulio covered me with the loose end of the blanket and tucked it under my feet saying, "It will be chilly during the night." He sat near the window, placed his forearms on the little table, and put his head down on his arms. I knew that he used to rest in that position for about a half-hour after lunch, but I was worried that he couldn't sleep like this the whole night.

"Why don't you climb on the upper shelf?" I asked him. "You will get tired staying like this."

"No," he answered, caressing me gently on the cheek, "I want to be close to you so you will feel secure and you and the baby will have a restful sleep."

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1. "My wife" [in Russian].

2. "Don't be afraid. Everything is all right, Madame." [in Italian].

3. "Thank you." [in Italian].

# Italian Consulate In Prague

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

The Red Cross convoy train arrived in Prague early in the morning. Giulio woke me up saying, "We are in Prague." While he was packing his military blanket, I combed my hair and put on my hat. A man in civilian clothing walked through the car announcing loudly in Italian, "Go out on the platform and follow the orders to go outside the station. You will be transported to town by bus."

We followed other Italians who were getting out on the platform. Then we saw that there were other foreigners remaining in the other cars. When all Italians were out, I saw that a few young women were among them. It made me feel at ease knowing that I was not the only woman among all these men in Italian military uniforms.

Another man directed us in Italian to go outside the station where some other men would tell us what to do next. Giulio told me, "All these men who are giving us directions are probably employees of the Italian consulate." Several old buses were waiting outside and we were directed to board them.

It was a beautiful autumn morning and, as we were traveling through the city of Prague, we were enchanted with its old gothic style buildings, which had not been damaged by the war like those we saw in Warsaw. I said, "*Praga yest krasna...*" are the words in a song that the Czechoslovakian young men proudly sang in the labor camp in Oelsnitz." And I translated them to Giulio, "Praga is beautiful..."

"It is indeed a very beautiful city," he replied and added, "I hope they will allow us to go out to see the city."

The buses stopped near a large brick building, which looked as if it had originally been a school, but during the war had been adapted by the Germans to house their soldiers. We were told to go down a long hall and settle in the rooms equipped with bunk beds and that we could use the showers and bathrooms. Giulio and I had to stay in a room with the other Italian men, who were considerate enough to offer us a bed in a corner near the window, where I could have some privacy.

As we were settling down, someone came to the room and announced, "Listen, young men, there is a cafeteria in the building where we can have some hot coffee." We all rushed there, because we hadn't had a warm drink since the morning before and Giulio and I enjoyed the hot ersatz coffee without sugar.

An employee of the Italian consulate came in and told us that we would be staying in Prague for several days until the consulate processed all men. He also explained that starting that morning with room number one, all men from each room would be accompanied to the consulate. Therefore, they should all have their military or other identification documents ready. Someone asked if we were allowed to go out to see the city. The employee answered that we were free to go any time after our documents were processed at the consulate; however, we should return to this building for supper because we could not buy any food in the city without food coupons.

The next morning our room was the first one to go. At the Italian consulate identifying the Italian men who were ex-prisoners of war in Germany was a routine

process; after their military documents were checked by the consul, they were issued a special "*Reduce*"<sup>1</sup> document given to the servicemen returning from the prisoner of war camps in Germany. Those men who were civilians and working in Germany during the war were issued temporary passports allowing them to go back to Italy.

After the consul interviewed us, Giulio received his "*Reduce*" document right away. For me, as the wife of an Italian citizen, they needed to prepare a temporary passport based on our certificate of marriage<sup>2</sup> and on my Soviet passport.<sup>3</sup> They asked me for a small photograph to attach to the document. I was lucky to have one photo without eyeglasses that I had made in Laband by one of those automatic cameras that make photos for identification cards. They accepted it. I was told to come back in the morning on the fourth of October to receive my temporary Italian passport.

As we walked out of the consulate, Giulio kissed me and said, "My dearest Lala, Rufin was right. We had no problem in getting your passport. The three thousand zloty were well spent! Now we have two days to see the beautiful city of Prague!" And he added joyfully, "We should consider this trip as our honeymoon trip, maybe somewhat unconventional. But, if you take into account that all our expenses are being paid by the Red Cross and the Italian government, we should not mind about the small inconvenience of staying in a former German military barracks, instead of a hotel."

I agreed and said, "Let's make it memorable!"

We had some Czechoslovakian money that the jeweler had given Giulio for the lathe. We wanted to buy some sweets or cookies, but, as they advised us, everything was rationed and we couldn't buy anything to eat without food coupons, except a cup of ersatz coffee without sugar that we were able to buy in the coffee shop.

Then in the center of the city we found a jewelry store and decided to try our luck there. The jeweler told us that he could sell us only silver jewelry. He showed us several pieces and quoted their prices. Giulio and I decided that we should spend all our Czechoslovakian money to buy something there, because we couldn't use it anywhere else. We selected two large square-shaped silver pins with engraved flowers—one for me, and another as a gift for Giulio's mother.

The rest of the day we enjoyed sightseeing in the city of Prague. We leisurely walked on the old streets and along the Moldau<sup>4</sup> River, which divides the city; we walked across some of the bridges, one of which was the famous Charles Bridge adorned with stone statues of Saint Charles. We also sent a telegram to my mother at Rufin's address and mailed two postcards with views of the city. We wrote in French and in German: "Everything is fine, as we expected. We will write to you when we arrive in Turin. Many kisses. Lala, Giulio." We were not sure that the telegram and the postcards would arrive at their destination, but we thought, if they do, Rufin, Lidia, and my mother will understand the meaning.

In the morning on the fourth of October we went to the Italian consulate to receive my temporary Italian passport. The consulate didn't return our certificate of marriage and Giulio asked to have it back so we could use that document in Italy. But the employee told him that they needed it for their records and that we had to request the original from the Town Hall in Poland where we were married.

I was upset that they might use it to check its authenticity, but Giulio calmly said, "Don't worry about it. They will put it in their files and it will be buried forever in the consulate archives, as it should be - it has served its purpose."

"When we walked out of the consulate, we found a quiet place to sit and Giulio, looking at my new document, said, "Lala, this temporary passport is issued to you as an Italian citizen."

I said, "I didn't know that the foreign spouse of an Italian would become an Italian citizen right away."

Giulio translated to me what was written on my Italian temporary passport.<sup>5</sup> I remarked, "But it is written here that this passport is valid only for repatriation purposes."

"However, this is an official document issued by the Italian consulate," Giulio replied, "and it will serve us in the beginning just fine. We may use it to register you as my wife at the STIPEL for family benefits and medical insurance. We also can show it to my parents so they will see that we are married and they will accept you as my legitimate wife. As you can see, this document is better than our Polish three-thousand-zloty certificate of marriage, which nobody would be able to read in Italy. It will serve its purpose until we get married in the church and receive an official certificate of marriage."

The rest of the morning we went sightseeing again and visited one church where we knelt and thanked God for helping us to remain together. We returned to the dormitory for lunch, as we were advised by the consulate employee to be back at that time. And there was a good reason for it. The Italian consulate was eager to send the Italians to the next destination point as soon as possible.

By the end of the day on the fourth of October 1945, all Italians who had arrived there from Katowitz were put on the same Red Cross convoy train that had brought them to Prague.

That train waited for them on the back tracks of the station. Other nationals who didn't have their consulates in Prague remained in the cars waiting for the Italians. We understood that this was the reason why the processing was done in such a hurry—it was a burden to feed them all.

Now the convoy train's destination was Munich, Bavaria. Because the railroad tracks had not been repaired everywhere after being damaged during the war, to reach Munich the convoy train had to travel on the repaired tracks through Austria. On the Czechoslovakian-Austrian border our documents were checked by Austrian border guards; and on the Austrian-German border by the American soldiers.

Since all the Italians had their documents issued by the Italian consulate in Prague and most men were wearing Italian military uniforms, the checking of the documents was only a formality; everybody just waved their documents in the air and that was the end of it.

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1. Ex-serviceman [in Italian].

2. See the chapter "The Three Thousand Zloty Solution."

3. From the the Soviet Passport.

4. Czech name of the river is Vltava. It is an affluent of the River Elbe.

5. From the Soviet Passport.

## Displaced Persons Center In Munich

By Olga Gladky Verro

## Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

When our Red Cross convoy train carrying persons of various nationalities arrived in Munich we were transported to the Displaced Persons Assembly Center. It was a large complex of former German military barracks consisting of two-and three-story brick buildings equipped with all the necessary facilities to house and feed the large number of people. The Americans administered this Displaced Persons Center and most people who were brought there were from southeastern Germany and Austria.

During World War II the Germans brought an enormous number of workers from all the European countries and from the Soviet Union to work in Germany. At the end of the war this mass of people became the responsibility of the Allied Occupational Forces. The Allies named these foreign workers "Displaced Persons", or as they were commonly called the "DPs," pronounced "dee-pees", or in the singular "DP", pronounced, "dee-pee". The Allies organized large Assembly Centers throughout Germany where all the DPs were transported to wait for repatriation to their countries of origin.

When our convoy train from Katowitz arrived at the Assembly Center in Munich, the DPs and Italian prisoners of war were divided by their country of origin and placed in separate quarters to wait until enough people were assembled to fill a convoy train to their country. The group of Italians was placed in a large two-story brick building where other Italians were already waiting for enough people for the convoy train to take them to Italy. Because the Italian consulate in Prague had already checked all the Italians who arrived from Katowitz and all had documents for repatriation, the processing in the Assembly Center office was done very quickly. They just checked the documents and added the names to their list of Italians.

Life in the Assembly Center was well organized. Giulio and I were placed in a room with several other Italian men with their wives. The room was large enough to provide some privacy for each couple. We could select bunk beds far from the others with empty beds in between, and we separated them by hanging up blankets.

All the couples were very reserved and the women didn't talk with each other—a sign that they were afraid to reveal something about themselves or their nationalities. The Italian husbands did most of the talking, generally about everyday happenings in the center and not much about themselves. After listening to the accents of the women in our room, Giulio and I agreed that none of them was French and we decided that it was safe for us to talk in French. We also agreed, if we were asked by the other Italians, to tell them that I was French. I was very cautious not to reveal my true nationality and when I was talking to somebody, I spoke only in German.

The food in the Assembly Center was provided by UNRRA.<sup>1</sup> Because I was pregnant, in addition to the food that all ate in the center cafeteria, I was receiving a ration of milk, like the children who were there with their families.

Although different nationalities were staying in separate buildings, or rooms, they were free to socialize with each other during the day or evening without any restrictions. Also, a pass to go to the City outside the Assembly Center was not hard to obtain. There were no guards posted anywhere, except at the main entrance gate, and there was free access to the Assembly Center office if one needed to get some information, place a complaint, or request something.

However, right away upon our arrival at the Assembly Center, we noticed that one

section of the center was separated from the rest of it by a high barbwire fence and was guarded by men in Soviet uniforms, which were the same as those in the NKVD camp in Laband. Indeed, we found out that that section was the Soviet section of the Assembly Center where the infamous Soviet Repatriation Officers were in charge. The unfortunate Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were brought there by Soviet Repatriation Officers in large and small groups from the former *Ostarbaitern* camps or were rounded up from the German farms where they worked. They were also flushed out of hiding among the other nationalities, where they had hoped to prevent their deportation to Soviet concentration camps. They had no choice but to immediately become prisoners of their government's political police.

The persons in the Soviet section were restricted not only from coming to the American section of the Center, but they were not even allowed to talk through the barbwire fence with the other nationalities. Despite these restrictions, they managed to tell their story to the people on the other side of the barbwire fence. It became well known that they had all been thoroughly interrogated by the Soviet Repatriation Officers, who dug out information about their past, including the years before the war and during the years of the German occupation of part of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Repatriation Officers were trying to catch all Soviet citizens whom they called the German "sympathizers," the "traitors," and the "collaborators."

The Soviets considered the Ukrainians from the eastern part of Poland, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians to be Soviet citizens because they were from the territories invaded and annexed by the Soviet Union shortly before 1941. Sometimes groups of DPs of mixed nationalities, including people from these lands and some Ukrainians and Byelorussians from the Soviet Union were brought to the American Assembly Center section. There were always some good people who immediately warned them about the Soviet Assembly Center section on the other side of the barbwire fence. They gave practical advice to these panicked newcomers on how they could protect themselves from the claws of the infamous Soviet Repatriation Officers. They taught them how they could conceal their true citizenship by declaring that they had lost their documents, by registering with the Ukrainian or Polish spelling of their names, and by declaring their birthplace to be in some non-annexed part of Poland. By using this advice, some were able to elude being transferred to the Soviet Assembly Center section and to avoid deportation to the Soviet Union. This was possible because the Poles and the Ukrainians native to Poland were admitted to the American section of the Assembly Center.

It was no wonder that all these nationalities were trying all possible means to avoid being placed in the Soviet section of the Assembly Center. By this time, it was common knowledge that the Soviet citizens feared for very obvious and legitimate reasons being deported back to their homeland. It was known that all those who had been in Germany during the war were regarded by the Soviets to be either "traitors" or "collaborators" with the Germans, or they were considered "politically contaminated" by being exposed to the "decadent" capitalist system and were in need of the re-indoctrination by the communists dogma.

Therefore, nobody was sent back to their hometowns, but directly to concentration camps in the farthest regions of the Soviet Union. This destination was for all of them, regardless of how they got to Germany. It didn't make any difference if

they were taken by force and deported by the Germans, or if they volunteered to work in Germany. Then there were many who left their homes and all that they owned and took the last opportunity to get out of the Soviet Union when the Germans were retreating, as was the case with my family. This last group of people had believed that living temporarily in German *Ostarbaitern* camps was a small price to pay for their liberation from communist oppression and gaining freedom after the end of the war.

Knowing all this I stayed as far as I could from the barbed wire fence, just to be sure that no one from the Soviet side of the Assembly Center could recognize me.

We stayed in that Assembly Center about a week or a few days more. Since the NKVD agents were known to snatch Soviet citizens on the streets of Munich, Giulio and I decided not to venture out for sightseeing in the city. Therefore, we enjoyed the leisurely life as Giulio called it, "Our honeymoon in the Assembly Center Hotel." We had plenty of time to talk and he told me many things about his family, his mother, father, and his brother, and about some of his relatives. He explained to me some of the habits particular to his family and his parents, and about some Italian customs and traditions that I might find different from what I was used to in my family and in my country. Giulio said that he was preparing me for what I could expect when we arrived in Turin.

One thing that Giulio was sure about was that, as soon as he arrived in Turin, he could return to work at his previous place of employment, the telephone company by the name of STIPEL, where he was working before being drafted at the beginning of the war. He said that this was the law passed by the Fascist government requiring that the large employers preserve the positions at work for the men returning from military service. Therefore, Giulio felt secure that he could provide for his new family, for his wife, and for his child.

During that week a new group of Italians arrived at the Assembly Center. This was a good sign that the convoy train for the repatriation of the Italians would be departing soon. Indeed, one evening there was a final count of people in each room and we were notified to get ready for the departure the next morning.

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1. UNRRA - acronym for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

## Finally Going Home

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

Early in the morning all the Italians waiting for repatriation at the Assembly Center in Munich were ordered out into the courtyard. They were given one loaf of bread each and some American canned food as they boarded trucks to be transported to the railroad station. The last leg of our journey to Italy started with jubilant men cheering and singing as they traveled through the city's streets.

When we were traveling on the convoy train to Italy, Giulio embraced me and said, "My dearest Lala, finally we are sure that we are going home."

The mood of the Italians returning home was elevated and was reinforced by the sounds of Italian songs in each car. The excitement and the joyful character of the

Italians were contagious and uplifting.

The Austrian border police walked through the cars checking only by sight that there were only Italians on the train. When the train had passed the station at Innsbruck, right before the Austrian-Italian border, it stopped and everybody was ordered to get out because the railroad tracks were not yet repaired after being damaged during the war. There were several American military trucks that transported our whole group across the Alps.

"Isn't this a beautiful honeymoon?" Giulio asked me.

"Yes, my dearest," I confirmed and added, "it is also a breathtaking view. This is the first time in my life that I have seen such high mountains!"

When the trucks were passing across the Austrian-Italian border, there was a lot of cheering and rejoicing by the Italian men returning to their homeland. A short distance from the border there was a train waiting for the returning sons of Italy.

As we were traveling through the stations in northern Italy, the train was stopping at even the smallest stations to let out those men who were arriving at their destination or who needed to catch connecting trains to their hometowns.

In that mountainous part of Italy there were many apple orchards bordering the railroad tracks. The trees were full of colorful fruit bending their branches and tempting the men who hadn't eaten them for more than two years. When the train would stop, the more audacious men were jumping out and running to the orchards, collecting the fruit inside their shirts. One young man in our compartment was among the brave ones who dared to collect a few apples. When he returned, he selected a bright red one, shined it with his sleeve, and presented it to me. "For you, Signora!"

I accepted it saying, "*Grazie*," and began right away to bite the juicy and sweet fruit.

When the train was stopping at the large stations, Giulio was telling me their names, as if they were milestones leading closer and closer to his hometown: "Bolzano..." "Trento..." "Verona..." "Brescia..." Finally, in the late afternoon we arrived at the big station in Milan. Giulio said, "Here we will get off and take another train to Turin."

At the station in Milan a large number of men got out of the convoy train to take the connecting trains to their hometowns. All together they went to the ticket office to find out how they could get the tickets for those trains, since most of them were ex-servicemen returning from German prisoner of war camps or other labor camps, and they didn't have any Italian money. The cashier told them that their *Reduce* document and provisional or temporary passport from the Italian consulate were sufficient to show the conductor on the train and on the streetcars to ride without tickets.

We had about forty-five minutes to wait for our train and Giulio decided to walk out of the station to have a look at the city. Outside he saw an old man selling hot chestnuts that he was roasting on the grill. Giulio searched his pockets for the few Italian coins he had and asked the old man if it was enough to buy some chestnuts. The man took a newspaper page, made a cone-shaped bag, and put a few chestnuts in it.

I had never tasted roasted chestnuts before. Giulio peeled one and presented it to me as some kind of a delicacy. As I put it in my mouth and began to chew it, I forced myself to swallow it and said, "I don't like it. It tastes very strange, like a sweet potato. Sorry, but I cannot eat another one." Giulio was very disappointed that my first experience with the popular Italian delicacy was unsuccessful, but he ate the remaining

chestnuts with obvious pleasure.

We returned to the station and boarded the train for Turin just by showing Giulio's *Reduce* document and my provisional passport. As we were traveling this last span of road leading to his hometown, Giulio became restless and was continually looking from the window to see where we were. Soon the evening darkness began to prevent him to recognize the places. Finally, the lights of the city began to appear, and the other passengers started to move toward the exit. Giulio collected our luggage from the top shelf and told me to follow him toward the exit door.

"This is the Porta Nuova Station of Turin," he told me as we walked out of the train onto the illuminated station platform. "I cannot believe that our journey is over!" exclaimed Giulio with emotion. "My dearest Lala, we have finally arrived in Turin! We are home!"



# Volume Three

*Volume Three is dedicated with love  
In memory of my dear parents  
My mother, Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky (1895-1999)  
And  
My father, Orest Mikhaylovich Gladky (1902-1983)*

*And In memory of my beloved husband,  
Giulio Verro (1915-1995)*

## Part Twelve

Mea Culpa... Mea Culpa...



# The Travel Journal

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My entries in the Travel Journal started on July 2, 1943 when I was taken by the Gestapo from my place of work in Slavyansk.<sup>1</sup> I was kept in the Gestapo cellar in Slavyansk, without any explanation of why I was imprisoned. I suspected that the master of the Soap Factory that I managed, who dreamed to become a manager himself, found a very good opportunity to get rid of me. He was the only one who could have reported to the Gestapo the exact time when I was distributing the soap to the workers—the evidence that I was pilfering the soap produced for the Germans.

On July 9, early in the morning before dawn all the prisoners were ordered to climb in a hurry on Gestapo trucks and transported to Gestapo Headquarters in Stalino, a trip of about 150 kilometers that was made in one day.

On July 18, after nine days of incarceration in the Gestapo cellar in Stalino during which they took only my identity data, I was moved with other prisoners by truck to the Gestapo concentration camp located near Makyeyevka<sup>2</sup> about 12 kilometers from Stalino. There the prisoners lived in the large dug-holes covered with earth roofs and worked in the fields. My health deteriorated rapidly for the lack of food, I was all swollen and could barely walk. I didn't expected to survive for long because the camp *Kommandant* had a quick way to deal with the prisoners who could not work in the fields—a bullet in the back of the head right on the spot.

In the middle of August my wife and daughter came to visit me in the Gestapo concentration camp. I saw them and came to the fence—only then they recognized me since I was swollen beyond recognition. It was an emotional reunion. When they told me that they are waiting any day to be on the convoy train bringing the conscripted workers to Germany, I thought that now I could die in peace knowing that they would be safe somewhere in Europe. They brought me lots of food thinking that maybe it was the first and the last time that they would see me. And I said good bye to my two dear women.

Then a week later my daughter came again to see me with another supply of food. She gave me the instructions for the next week to sit every day near the medical barrack and wait for the red-haired German who shall come from the Gestapo Headquarters in Stalino. He promised to help me while the camp *Kommandant* was on leave to Germany. I had little hope, but did exactly as she told me.

On August 25, as instructed, I was sitting near the door to the medical barrack when the young red-haired German arrived with the new *Kommandant* and right away pointed at me commenting about my health condition. *Kommandant* listened attentively to the red-haired young man, called medical officer in charge and ordered to send me immediately to the hospital. I was ordered to climb on the horse-cart and was transported to the hospital in Makyeyevka<sup>3</sup> where I was kept under security of the Ukrainian Gestapo concentration camp guard. The next day my daughter arrived in the hospital with a big bag of winter clothing and food. She apologized that it was all that

she was able to carry on her back for 12 kilometers from Stalino. She said that it was probably her last visit, since they could any time depart for Germany with the convoy train of the conscripted workers.

To my surprise, in couple of days my wife and daughter arrived to Makyeyevka with the horse-cart carrying all their possessions, which they were able to take from home. The *Lagerfuhrer* of the Regional Conscripted Labor Center in Stalino allowed them to leave the Center and come to take care of me under the condition that they would return to the Center as soon as my health had improved. My wife was able to bribe the Ukpainian guards to allow her and my daughter to stay with me every day and she paid the local doctor to restore my health. The guards got used to my waking in the hospital garden, as ordered by the doctor, and were happy to collect bribes from my wife who paid them by selling items of our clothing on the market.

At the end of August, the front line with the Soviet Army was coming closer and closer and the panic among the population to move away from the front line began. By that time the edema was gone, my body became lean, I was able to walk<sup>4</sup> and spend whole afternoons in the garden. On September 3, 1943 my wife and daughter made a decision that this was the right time for me to escape from the hospital. The three of us just walked away through an opening in the hospital fence made by the workers who used it as a shortcut. We took with us just some food and enough clothing, especially winter items, that we could carry in the make-shift bags leaving behind all the rest. Part of the 12 kilometers to Stalino we made by foot and part on the small Gestapo truck that we asked for a ride.<sup>5</sup>

On the same day, when we arrived in Stalino, we found the convoy train to Germany<sup>6</sup> with the conscripted workers standing on the tracks ready to leave. The three of us were put in the cattle cars by the *Lagerfuhrer* of the Conscripted Labor Center. He knew that I was a fugitive from the Gestapo concentration camp, but he shook my hand and wished us luck. Why? Only he knew the answer. But for us there was no other choice—I had to get away from being captured as a fugitive by the Gestapo and we had to save ourselves from the claws of the Soviet NKVD that, without a doubt, would have arrived there soon.

It took two weeks to cross Ukraine, Poland, and eastern Germany. We arrived in Dresden, where we were placed in the *Ostarbeitern* camp.<sup>7</sup>

On September 28, 1943 my wife, daughter and I were transferred by train to another *Ostarbeitern* camp in Plauen and the next day to Oelsnitz *Ostarbeitern* camp where we were placed to work at the Heinkel Airplane Factory.<sup>8</sup> There we stayed until May 18, 1944 when we were transferred to Laband in Oberschlesia to work at the Laband *Werke*<sup>9</sup> where we worked until the advancing Soviet Army was a few days from Laband.

On January 22, 1945 a family decision was made that I shouldn't remain in Laband and be taken by the Soviets. My wife couldn't walk as she had a severe shiatica and my daughter decided to remain with her hoping that there wouldn't be immediate reprisals against the women and that God would not abandon them. We all knew that we could be separated, maybe, forever. But my two women insisted that there was no other alternative for me—to remain meant to be captured by the NKVD and sent to the concentration camp in Siberia. That was a sure punishment, if not worse, for having written so many anti-communist, anti-soviet articles in the Slavyansk newspaper during

the German occupation. My brother Igor didn't have any choice either. The only solution for us to escape from the advancing Soviet Army was to move West hoping to reach the areas occupied by the Western Allies. That evening we got ready and Giulio, the young Italian who was courting my daughter, promised to stay with her and my wife.

On January 23, 1945, early in the morning, my brother Igor and I left Laband and our families not knowing if we would ever see them again.<sup>10</sup> Because there were no trains for the civilians, we had to start our journey into unknown by foot. During the first days we decided to walk as fast as we could to maintain a good distance, but sometimes we found ourselves only a few hours from the front.

The first day we made by foot 38 kilometers. It was a very cold winter that year. The heavy snowfall just the day before made difficult to walk mostly on the side of the road because the road was filled with very long columns of exhausted war and concentration camp prisoners and conscripted laborers led by the German convoy guards deeper into Germany. Those who had no strength to walk the convoy guards moved a few steps on the side of the road and with one shot in the back of the head were ending their suffering. Here and there beeping out from under the snow one could see a hand, a leg or a head and sometimes half-naked corpses. Under such conditions it was impossible to outdistance this unending stream of people and our journey was filled with terrible visions from which one couldn't escape.

We were not alone on the road, there were many others from Eastern part of Europe—Polish, Estonians, Latvians, Ukrainians, and German civilians—all were fleeing from the advancing Soviet Army and hurrying west to be on the side of Western Allies. We listen where all this people were coming from, where the front line was the day or couple of days ago and estimated the distance and direction to move ahead from being overtaken by the Soviet Army.

On the first day it was already getting dark, when we had to stop in Jungen Birken<sup>11</sup> because the military authorities were not allowing anyone to move further. There were so many refugees that we barely found the place to stay overnight. We were able to pay with the *Deutchmarks* that my wife and daughter brought all the way from home. Those *Deutchmarks* served us well and Igor's speaking German was also an important factor in finding place to stay overnight. Here, we found ourselves very close to the Soviets. It was a very anxious night. All night could be heard the the metallic clanking of the soviet tanks, big guns fire, shell explosions, small guns and machine guns fire and perceptible movement either German or Soviet troupes.

Morning caught not only us but the whole population of Jungen Birken laden with anxiety. Astonishing persistence of the German militarists terribly hindered the movement west paving the way in the near future for the panic-stricken flight of thousands of people, who already ignored the orders of authorities whose power was dying but they continued to believe in the miraculous change on the front. It was clear that the German Army commanders could not even comprenend that the front didn't exist any more, that the soviet tanks were to the left and to the right, in front and in the back, and could at any moment and at any place attack the undefended boroughs and small towns. The small scattered groups of beardless boys in those places couldn't prevent their invasion—only yesterday they got the handguns and the anti-tank weapons in their hands and, probably, didn't had time even to learn how to use them. I should add to this that not even once have we seen one offizer commanding these boys. Of course,

we were nervous more than anybody else, but it was impossible to jump over the barrier of the German military stupidity.

On the second day, January 24, the columns of hungry, exhausted people finally began to move west. We put all efforts on our own legs and by walking hurriedly through Gropkau where we understood that it was impossible to board the departing and, probably, the last train west. We made 23 kilometers and by evening found ourselves in the heavenly Barn<sup>12</sup> where there were already gathered German refugees who got the asylum in the school with the ersatz coffee and a couple of sandwiches of unknown content. Fortunately, my brother being a *Folksdeutsche*, and registering himself first automatically attached me too to the German people, therefore I enjoyed all the delights of the Barn's hospitality without feeling a remorse. In the morning we received the same ersatz coffee, and the same couple of sandwiches of suspicious content, put on our backs our light backpacks and hurried on our way as fast as we could on very deep snow.

On January 25 going from Barn my fellow-traveler brother and I, straining to the limit our strength, began to pass on the side of the road in deep snow the long black ribbon of people. It coiled as an ill-omened snake leaving on its way markings with the shot down prisoners of war and concentration camps who couldn't keep pace with the column. On that day we deviated considerably to the left, leaving to the right the main mass of refugees and all those whom the Germans were leading under guard. For some reason all were rushing toward Breslau, toward the railroad, we, instead, were trying to find the more quiet road. Physically and emotionally tired, and growing weaker for the lack of food, we couldn't push on as before and made about 18 to 20 kilometers by foot and were lucky to get a ride on the truck for 36 kilometers, thus gaining a good distance from the front.

In the evening we found ourselves in the charming little town of Sternberg where we found a warm refuge with sandwiches and the ersatz coffee for refugees. Although we were very tired, we were not able to keep ourselves from admiring the classical gothic architecture that survived until these terrible times. Its esthetic beauty was especially standing out against the white wintery background of nature. In Sternberg we found a place to stay and took the opportunity to rest for one day.<sup>13</sup>

On January 27 happen to be a wonderful sunny day. Our light backpacks didn't bother us much and a good rest and extra sandwiches that reinforced our strength, allowed us to make 18 kilometers with more ease walking on the paved road not obstructed by the convoys. In the twilight we were coming down in the fable-like antique town of Schonberg, noticing that there were people peacefully walking on its streets. There were those who were busy going somewhere, the others were entering calmly in the brightly illuminated stores with large show-windows, where were displayed tasty foods or elegant clothes. The others were entering the restaurants, coffee shops, or simply taking a walk in the narrow, running up or down streets. Suddenly, it seemed that there was no war.

We joined the crowd. Our backpacks didn't make any impression on the passers-by and soon we understood why nobody was paying any attention to us when we ourselves felt as foreigners (which we actually were). In the constantly moving crowd we soon noticed the same homeless refugees from the East as us and that the town was overloaded with all kinds of refugees. And farther on we witnessed that this town

had been subject more than once to the bombardment by the Allies. We noticed the signs of deep wounds when we came to the huge five or six story building, corner of which fell off and the rubble was already removed from the square by the hands of diligent townspeople. All windows were carefully boarded but one couldn't detect even one piece of glass on the sidewalk. This building served as a shelter for refugees and we entered it.

In the large vestibule there were flickering stearine candles in the metal saucers. The Red Cross nurses were giving to all arriving refugees the same coffee ersatz and the same sandwiches, which we swallowed right on the spot. A young girl led us on the wide marble stairs to the second floor. As soon as we entered in a wide but semi-dark hall illuminated with the same flickering candles, the huge building jolted, the faint tiny lights quivered and some dyed out. The frightened nurse pushed me in the darkness and I found myself immersed up to my waist in the straw. A deafening explosion rumbled, something somewhere cracked, some small debrees fell on me; somewhere someone screamed; then everything got quiet and silence fell. It seemed that the whole world concealed itself waiting for something even more terrible. But quietly laying in the straw I heard unexpected whistle of the falling bombs, the explosions that were making tremble the building, more screams and moans that were intruding in the darkness. I was thinking that in this enormous pile of straw, in this impenetrable darkness one could easily be buried alive. I remembered about my brother. Where was he? And in a loud voice I called his name but there was no answer. I concluded that I was completely alone. During the night the air bombardment repeated.

In the morning the door wide opened, the nurse placed on the floor couple of sandwiches and ersatz coffee, which I consumed quickly. Then I cleaned up my clothing as best as I could from the straw and went downstairs in vestibule where I got a couple of sandwiches for the road. When I exited out of the building, I saw that everything I heard that night happened somewhere beyond our building and the tiny square didn't had any signs of the air raid. My brother joined me and we went right away to the railroad station and were lucky to buy the tickets to Glatz and made in one day 90 kilometers on the train.

Farther from the front it was easier to travel by train and the next day in Glatz we also succeeded to get on the train and traveled 53 kilometers to Waldenburg, Gorlitz, Dresden, and reached Leipzig the next day. On January 30, we were still lucky to make it by the train to the small town of Langensalz where we were hoping to find rest in the place of my brother's very good friend, a *Folksdeutsche*. But she was working at some secret establishment and lived as a bird in the golden cage. She was forbidden to have any contact with us and they gave her one single German minute to talk to him in German and in the presence of the German police. Since we went there because my brother was sure that we could find place to stay, we didn't know where to go next. In Langensalz we rested for two days and on February 2 we got on the train again and traveled 39 kilometers to Ehrfurt. There we couldn't find a peaceful situation and heard rumors that there was a possibility to stay in the refugee camp in Dresden and on the next day we got on the train to try our luck.

In Dresden we tried to be admitted to the refugee camp. During the interview we were advised that everybody would return "home to their country of origin," which meant for us to the Soviet Union. We understood that this was not the place for us to stay but

just a place to rest before moving westward. After a week we heard the rumors from the newly arrived refugees to the camp that the Soviet Army was moving closer to Dresden. On February 11, 1945 the whole camp was moved by train to Waldheim, a 60 kilometers ride.<sup>14</sup>

At the displaced persons camp in Waldheim we stayed until May 6, 1945 when the news about the advance of the Soviet Army produced a panic and we, as most of the others in the camp had to think about our safety. The town from an early morning was agitated. Yesterday half of the town was taken over by the Americans but in the morning we discovered that in our half the Soviets were running the show. Our situation was complicated because the town was divided by the small river Chopau, which was impossible to cross. In front of the bridge gathered a large crowd of foreigners waiting when the Soviet and American commanders decide the question to allow us or not to allow to cross the bridge.

My brother and I were patiently waiting near the bridge. At about four o'clock in the afternoon one elderly German woman, carefully making her way through the crowd, stopped next to me and softly asked, "Do you want to get on the other side?"

"Ya," I replied quietly.

"Than, why you are standing here? Do you know where is the railroad bridge?"

"Ya, I know..."

"It's blown up... But the boards were already placed, so it is possible to get across. You should hurry there before "they" find out and place the guards there... Go, go, don't loose time!" And without waiting to hear from me "Thank you," she disappeared in the crowd warning others she choose to save.

"Let's go!" I grabbed my brother's hand. And, eager to get out of this dangerous place, we hurried up to the railroad bridge, the middle of which was resting on the bottom of the river. Between the moving mutilated parts were already placed thick heavy boards, on which we easily crossed to the American side. After climbing on the steep riverbank, we got on the paved road and hurried to Dobelin, a 10 kilometer walk.

The next day we returned back to Waldheim to the American camp and the day after moved to another Waldheim camp named Hart '61. On May 8, 1945, when the end of the war was declared, we began a cat-and-mouse game escaping by foot from town to town, resting where we could for day or two, trying to get as far as we could from the places occupied by the Soviet Army and from those UNRRA camps operated by the Americans where the Soviet Repatriation Officers were allowed to do their dirty work. During our travel and staying over in the UNRRA camps we heard enough about how the Soviet Repatriation Officers operated trying to catch and deport "home" those who didn't want to return to the concentration camps in Siberia. Of course, since we didn't want to be deported there, we tried not to stay for long in such UNRRA camps and spent most of out time on the road.

On May 8 we walked to Sachsenhof where we stayed in UNRRA camp one week; on May 14 we walked to Nassen and Wilschwitz; on May 17—to Monstar and Frankenau. We were hurrying so much to make some distance from the Soviets that I didn't recorded the distances between them. On May 18 we made 35 kilometers by foot to Schlendeffen where we found work and stayed there for three weeks.

On June 10 we started again our daily marches in search of DP camps for "Easterners," those that were not considered the Soviet citizens, and the camps where

the Soviet Repatriation Officers couldn't reach us. It seems that Soviet officers were allowed by the Americans and English to roam freely in most camps that we stopped so far. Therefore, we continued walking. That day we walked 35 kilometers to Schorba; the next day, June 11, we walked 37 kilometers to Windishholzhausen; June 12, always by foot—40 kilometers to Groffenten; June 13—other 17 kilometers to Eisenach and June 14, still by foot—28 kilometers to Ilfa.

On June 15, we continued walking—20 kilometers to Wischmannshausen; the next day—33 kilometers to Friedlos; and the next day—30 kilometers to Burgham. On June 18 we walked 34 kilometers to Kerzell; the next day—27 kilometers to Niederzell; and on June 20—only 10 kilometers to Selmunster. The same day we were lucky to get on the train and made 39 kilometers to Hanau; from there on the same day we walked 11 kilometers to Mainkar, stayed overnight and resumed walking in the morning.

From June 21 to June 23, 1945 we walked every day: 22 kilometers—to Hochst; the next day—19 kilometers to Marxdorf; and on June 23, we made only 10 kilometers to Erbenheim where we found a place to stay and rested for one day.

From June 25 to June 30 we walked again every day: 20 kilometers—to Wackernheim; 14 kilometers—to Kempden; 22 kilometers—to Bacharach; 20 kilometers—to Hirzenach; 25 kilometers—to Siechelnhausen; then 5 kilometers—to Koblenz where we rested for two days then made 22 kilometers to Buchholz where on the next day we were lucky to get on the train and rode 47 kilometers to Simmern; and on the same day, made 9 kilometers by foot to Argenthal.

During the month of June 1945 my brother Igor and I were traveling mostly by foot from Laband toward Koblenz.<sup>15</sup> In our estimate, so far we made approximately 525 kilometers fleeing from the places that were already occupied by the Red Army. It had been a long six months since we left our families, already more than a month since Germany finally surrendered. But we still lacked a clear-cut plan to foil the Soviets in their own plan to forcibly deport from Western Zones to the USSR every former Soviet citizen, including those who choose not to return. They called it "taking us home."

Unfortunately, both the Americans and the English were duped by the Soviets not only into permitting this procedure but to facilitate the Soviets taking people, by force if necessary, from the refugee camps in Western occupation zones. Soviet Repatriation officers were allowed by the Americans and English to roam freely in most UNRRA camps in which we stopped so far. Therefore, we continued walking and searching. In most towns, we were able to obtain with my brother's *Folksdeutsche* documents the provision coupons from the *burgermaisters*. This allowed us to buy food with the *Deutschmarks* we had. Luckily I had all the *Deutschemarks* (the occupational German currency) that Tonya and Olya had been able to garner by selling clothing and household items before leaving our home. That currency was useless to them once the Soviets occupied Laband, so they insisted I take it all. Igor also had some money, thus we could pay for overnight stays, and for food which was increasingly difficult to obtain. And we tried to stay overnight mostly in the German barns taking opportunity of farmers' hospitality and their simple but healthful food.

Igor and I, as many others who feared deportation back into detested Soviet system, tried by any and all means to get as far West as we possibly could. Only few times were we able to board the train. The rest of our travel was solely by foot, between 10 to 35 kilometers a day, depending on weather and places we could find to stay

overnight.

On July 5 we resumed walking every day until July 11, trying to make each day as much as we could: 18 kilometers to Stromberg; 22—to Hakenheim; 33—to Klein-Winternheim; 18—to Hochheim; 21—to Bremthal; 9—to Dasbach; and 3 kilometers to Idsten where we found a place to stay in UNRRA camp and decided to have a good rest. We remained there for 17 days.

On July 28 we resumed our walk and made that day only 12 kilometers to Reichenbach; the next day again 12—to Merzhausen; and the day after 6—to Usingen where the same day we were lucky to get on the train and made 34 kilometers to Weilburg. And the next day we walked only 4 kilometers to Lonberg where on August 1 we got on the train again and traveled 21 kilometers to Wetzlar; being rested on the train, the same day we walked 3 kilometers to Gerbenheim where we rested for one day.

On August 3, 1945 we were lucky again to made by train 12 kilometers to Gissen where we rested one day and had a real luck on August 5 to get the tickets to Hanau and made 300 kilometers continuing on the train the next day to Aschaffenburg and to Wurzburg. On August 7 we took the train for other 300 kilometers to Fuhrt. There we couldn't find the place to stay and walked 14 kilometers the same day to Wolkersdorf and stayed there overnight. All those Deutchmarks that my wife and daughter insisted that I take with me came really handy for the tickets and in finding places to stay and Igor's German was invaluable, too.

On August 8 we resumed walking until August 18: 28 kilometers—to Rottenbach; 39—to Monheim; 8—Buchdorf; 35—to Herbertshofen; 20—to Augsburg where we rested for two days in the UNRRA DP camp. We wanted to remain in Augsburg for several days to clarify the situation about the "Easterners". But decided to move toward Mannheim to another DP camp with a hope that by then the question pertaining to us will be clarified.

On August 15 we resumed to walk: 38 kilometers—to Kicklingen, the next day 26—to Ballmertshoffen; 41 kilometers—to Huttlingen; 25—to Lauffen a/k. There on August 19 we got luck to get a ride on the truck for 27 kilometers to Hall and on the same day made 14 kilometers by foot to the place called Burbenorbis.

On August 20 we resumed waking until August 28, 1945: 31 kilometers—to Ellhofen; 29 kilometers—to Gundelsheim; 29—to Zuringenberg a/n; 27—to Neckarsteinach; 24—to Edingen; 11—to Meunheim and, the same day, 5—to Viernheim where we rested for two days.<sup>16</sup>

On August 28, 1945 we walked 10 kilometers to Kafertal. There we stayed in the DP camp for more then two weeks trying to find out all the information about the DP camp in Mannheim, especially, if there were any Soviet Repatriation Officrers there, and what documents were needed to be accepted in that camp. It was clear to us from the previous DP camps we encountered and stayed for short time that, if we register as Soviet citizens we would be at the mercy of the Soviet Repatriation Officers. They were allowed to visit the DP camps operated by the Americans and English and allowed to force the Soviet citizens to transfer to the camps operated by the Soviets.

We found out that UNRRA camp in Mannheim was operated by the Americans and they accepted only those DP Ukrainians who were from the territory of Poland not previously annexed in 1939 by the Soviet Union, therefore, they were considered Polish citizens. For my brother Igor and me there was no problem to present ourselves as Ukrainians since we both could speak well Ukrainian. And we found out from the other

DPs that we could declare that we have lost our documents, in which case for the purpose of registration we could give as our birthplaces and previous residences by selecting any town in the non-annexed Polish territory.

On September 14, 1945 Igor and I decided to walk 5 kilometers to Mannheim, to assume new identities, and to register in the DP camp operated by the Americans.<sup>17</sup> We stayed in Mannheim DP camp, where we worked until August 30, 1946 when for some unknown to us reasons we were moved by train 350 kilometers to another DP camp in Wildfleken where we stayed and worked until June 22, 1947 when they moved us back to Mannheim DP camp where we stayed waiting for our destiny—which country in the world would offer an asylum to “stateless” people. By the end of our journey when we finally registered in the Displaced Persons UNRRA camp in Mannheim we criss-crossed the whole Germany!

In the beginning of our journey I felt that we made the right decision to leave my wife and daughter in Laband because it would have been impossible for Tonya and very hard for Olya to walk such distances and in the cold weather.

Even when the hardship of journey was eased by the warmer weather and possibility to get on the train, it seemed that the decision we made to leave our families in Laband was the right decision. But the stories we heard from the people who were able to escape from the places already occupied by the Soviets, the images of horror about what could have happen to my dear ones were becoming more terrifying and more frequent. I began to imagine all kinds of terrible things that could have happened to them and in the moments when we rested I wrote in my Travel Notebook the thoughts that tormented me by day and night.<sup>18</sup>

I shared my concerns with my brother, my regrets and fears about loved ones whom we left and what they are going through without us. But Igor didn’t want to talk about it and I couldn’t understand how he could be so detached or even indifferent to what could have happened to his family. In fact, he was annoyed with my torment of conscience and once we settled in the camp he began to avoid being with me for long periods of time.

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1. See the chapter: “The Gestapo SD Section.”

2. See the chapter: “The Red-Haired GermanAngel.”

3. See the chapter: “By the New *Kommandant’s* Order.”

4. See the chapter: “The Escape.”

5. “Orest M. Gladky Travel Journal.”

6. See the chapter: “Journey Toward the Unknown.”

7. Orest M. Gladky, *Putyevoy journal* [in Russian], [“Travel Journal,” Itinerary on the road across Germany, 1945-1946].

8. See the chapters: “Ostarbeitern Camp in Oelsnitz” and “Remnants of the Heinkel Aircraft Factory.”

9. See the chapter: “*Presswerke* Laband.”

10. See the chapters: “The Soviet Army is Advancing” and “Giulio Comes to Stay With Us.”

11. Orest M. Gladky, *Putyevoy journal* [in Russian], “Travel Journal.”

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Orest M. Gladky, *Sapisnaya knizhka* [in Russian], MS, excerpts, [“Notebook”, 1945-1946, kept on the road during a journey across Germany while fleeing from the advancing Red Army].

16. Orest M. Gladky, *Putyevoy journal* [in Russian], “Travel Journal.”

17. Ibid.

18. See the chapter: "Woe Is Me!"

## Woe Is Me!

Orest M. Gladky

Translated by Olga Gladky Verro, Edited by Oliver W. Kellogg

*"Good Lord, save Your people and bless Thy flock."*

-From Russian Orthodox prayer.

June 15, 1945, Wischmannshausen, Germany<sup>1</sup>

To you, dearest and closest to me, I dedicate the rest of my life. To you who are closest to my heart, Tonya and Olya, I offer my sufferings. I desire only one thing that you, my two beautiful women, shall endure without suffering the terrible burden of the Soviet camps. Rather, I want to expiate with my sufferings that great sin which lies on my heart as a heavy stone. Yes, I am deeply guilty before you, my wife and my daughter. If God in His mercy would deliver me forgiveness from this great sin, perhaps we will meet again for a better life...

June 24, 1945, Erbenheim, Germany

Our clothes and shoes were wearing out, but Igor seemed unconcerned. And I heard also very little concern from him about his family—maybe he was quiet so his conscience would not bother him about leaving them. Or maybe I talked too much about leaving my dear ones and he chose not to add to my own torment.

As we rested a day in Erbenheim I tried to salve my conscience by imagining that everything was all right with my wife and daughter, and that they were living safely in our home in Slavyansk. Then I began to wonder. Could I see them? Even join them? I knew that it would be impossible as Orest M. Gladky, my true identity. But—could I change my identity? And if so—how?

I mused about workings of the Soviet system. Could there be a way to use its bureaucratic weakness to oversmart it, to turn it against itself? And in that flight of my imagination, in my notebook I wrote a short story, "A Man Reborn."<sup>3</sup> Re-reading the story, I was surprised that the idea had not come to my mind sooner, since all my adult life I had been running to evade the clutches of GPU, KGB, and NKVD.

July 18, 1945, Idstein, Germany

Are you alive? Are the hearts beating in your chests? If they are, then I know that your thoughts and feelings are rushing through the mists of these troubled times to the one who gave rise to your sufferings – to me. When leaving you, I wanted to tell you, my dearest, "Forgive and farewell..." But I still had a faint hope to meet you again. And now all is gone... Only the heavy imagining of your agonizing death oppresses me... Yes, I see blood, blood, and blood. But it is too late. I can no more give my life for yours. I pray the Almighty: "Save and preserve my dear ones. Give happiness to my daughter and peace to my wife. Save their lives for our future encounter and better life..." If it is not too late.

August 3, 1945, Between Wetzlar and Gissen, Germany

My dear wife! Would that I see you again at least once more in my life, so I could kneel before you and ask your forgiveness for those great sins, which I committed before you all my life. Yes, I would kiss your feet and pray for your forgiveness.

Only now, at this time of misfortune, in these worst of times for all of us, did come to me full recognition not only of my guilt, but also of your saintliness. Only now comes to me the full recognition of all the richness of your soul, your character, your foresightedness, your goodness the price of which no one knows, and the grandeur of which no one could estimate!

You are the holiest of all saints not only because you are my wife but also because you allowed me to remain near you after all my sins, notwithstanding that you didn't give me complete forgiveness... I know it was done for the sake of our daughter and I appreciate you even more because you are even more saintly as a mother!

And me? I am the villain of our misfortune, who destroyed up our life with mistakes and poor judgment; I am completely worthless... I should be condemned to eternal sufferings—I have earned it... But I believe in one thing. If you come to a complete forgiveness toward me, then if we encounter each other we could share a better life...

My daughter! If life in its own way shall allow us to see each other again, I also would ask for your forgiveness, not only for my sins toward your mother but also for your burdened life, even though I could never deserve to be forgiven. On contrary, I shall bear for you all the heavy weight of my sins toward you! My dear ones! Forgive me! I am begging you...

August 14, 1945, Augsburg, Germany

I am afraid to say it, but for some reason it seems to me that I should: "Lord, rest in peace your servants Antonina and Olga..." It is terrible. If my salvation from the Bolsheviks was bought with the death of my dearest ones, it would be better also for me to accept agonizing death. Today in Augsburg I encountered Galochka Kriklovensky who is the age of my daughter, and in front of my eyes appeared all whom I lost, and a lump stuck in my throat.

August 21, 1945, Ellhofen, Germany

I remember that on Olya's birthday Tonya got a cake from the German woman. On the cake was written "22," the number of my daughter's years. The number was cracked and a frightening thought flashed in my mind, "Something terrible would happen."

And it did happen. My dear ones, those whom I love more than my life, are doomed... Lord! I would give anything for their salvation from the barbarians.

It would be good if Giulio could help them with something. But if he couldn't? Death definitely is waiting for them, if they are still alive... My God, my God, I am the only one guilty in their sufferings and their death.

My thoughts are diverse. Sometimes it seems to me that by Olya's initiative they left following my departure and maybe now are somewhere in France or in Italy. Then, I think that it is possible that after the Bolsheviks arrived they sneaked into Poland and there masqueraded as foreigners. Maybe they were able to make their way even to Russia. I even considered that in the guise of foreigners they could have survived until the fall of Germany and made their way into one of the Allied zones. But the most terrible imagining, which constantly torments me, is the horrible, tortured with

humiliation death of them all... In the mind's eyes I see sufferings and blood...

And I am the only one guilty in all of this. Even Olga proved to be more foresighted than I. My hate of the Bolsheviks blinded me to everything. I am guilty also in the final instance. I had not had the strength to persist, in the last moment to insist that we leave all together. Had that happened it would have been much easier now with all together.

But now, if my dear ones are alive, they are tormented by thoughts about my fate; while I have the most terrible thoughts about theirs. Now I am as Cain. There is no peace for me on this sinful earth. My sins toward my dear ones will torment me to the end of my days.

Thy will be done, my God, my Judge. I pray You only for one thing: save and have mercy on Olga and Tonya, give them a chance to live at least tolerably, give them a chance to die by their natural death, save them from humiliation, which they don't deserve. Don't allow the sins of their husband and father to hang over their heads as a Damocles sword. Transfer all the weight of their lives only onto me. I believe in Your goodness and charity, therefore I ask You for great mercy toward my dear ones: "Save them and show them Your mercy."

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1. Orest M. Gladky, *Sapisnaya knizhka* [in Russian], MS, excerpts, [Notebook kept on the road, 1945-1946, during a journey across Germany while fleeing from the advancing Red Army after he left his wife and daughter in Laband]. Also *Putyevoy journal* [in Russian], [Travel Itinerary on the road across Germany, 1945-1946], excerpts. Additions as recounted by Orest M. Gladky. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Also, see the chapters "The Soviet Army Is Advancing" and "Giulio Comes To Stay With Us."

2. Orest M. Gladky, *Putyevoy journal* [in Russian], [Travel Journal], excerpts.

3. See the chapter "A Man Reborn."

## Post-World War Two Refugee Crisis in Europe

By Olga Gladky Verro

The total number of displaced persons in Europe after World War Two was thirty million or more<sup>1</sup> and by the end of the war "Europe choked with refugees."<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that from 1939 to 1945 that Nazi Germany brought to Germany about eight million of men and women as forced laborers from all the European countries and from the Soviet Union. The westward march of Soviet Armies "uprooted hundreds of thousands and eventually millions" and created "a refugee crisis of unprecedented magnitude."<sup>3</sup>

"German military collapse began during February and March 1945, and between then and formal surrender on May 8, chaos reigned... in Germany and the rest of Europe."<sup>4</sup> "By ...the end of September, the Western Allies cared for nearly seven million displaced persons; the Soviets claimed... an equal number. The largest group in both places was Soviet citizens, over 7.2 million forced laborers and prisoners of war..." There were almost two million French, including 765,000 civilian workers..." There were

also Poles with more than 1.6 million; Italians, 700 thousand; Czechs, 350 thousand; Dutch and Belgians, over 300 thousand each; and many others from every European country.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, there was a flood of refugees and disaffected persons who were fleeing the advancing Soviet Army and from being subjected to Soviet control. Their homelands were in the Caucasus, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Poland, and the Baltic States; and there were "many deserters from the Red Army and members of the various Soviet peoples who had fought against the Soviets on the German side." Among them were members of the anti-Soviet Army of General Vlasov;<sup>6</sup> those of Cossack General Peter Krasnov;<sup>7</sup> a group of Georgians commanded by the old émigrés' former princes; and 30,000 Cossacks in Italy.<sup>8</sup>

Among this mass of displaced people "was every possible kind of individual" that in that confusion was almost impossible to differentiate. There were teenagers drafted as forced laborers, entire family groups, and political dissidents fleeing from the Soviets, political prisoners, evacuees, and concentration camp inmates, as well as various individuals on the run, such as hard criminals, German ex-Storm Troopers, concentration camp guards, and Nazi collaborators of every European nationality. All this mass of people moved in different directions across Germany "with pathetic bundles of belongings, sometimes pushing handcarts...piled with household belongings."<sup>9</sup>

The Western Allies officially applied name "refugees" to the civilians uprooted by the war in their own country, and the name "displaced persons," commonly referred as "DPs," to the individuals outside their countries. With time, more discriminate categories were devised in order to differentiate between various groups so as to facilitate providing for their needs for assistance, repatriation, or relocation to the various countries which were willing to accept them for permanent residence. And for practical purposes of facilitating administration, the Western Allies segregated refugees and DPs into nationality groups.

"In July, (1945) when the Western allies pulled back from the large areas of Germany according to an agreement with the Soviets, they transferred large numbers of nominally Soviet citizens to the Russians [Soviets]; ...more than 2.75 million were handed over, many of them involuntarily."<sup>10</sup>

"The Russians [Soviets] insisted on prompt transfer to Soviet jurisdiction and an early dispatch of refugees to Russia [Soviet Union]." And the "Allies cooperated eagerly with Soviet representatives prior to a comprehensive agreement about repatriation" because they were also interested in a speedy transfer of their own prisoners of war liberated by the Soviet Army.

In February 1945 in the Crimea at the Yalta conference between Western Allies and the Soviet Union covering reciprocal procedures for Liberated Prisoners of War and Civilians of Western Allies, the Allies acceded to Stalin's demands. "Western representatives probably didn't realize how many Russians dreaded being sent back to the Soviet Union." And "...when Stalin indicated that Soviet citizens should be returned as soon as possible, they immediately promised to send them back." It should be noted that "...the discussion included nothing about forcible repatriation; all parties seem to have taken this for granted." As a result, the "Soviet citizens were... gathered together, housed separately, subject to Soviet law, and handed over to Soviet authorities."<sup>11</sup>

The agreement “legitimatized the access... of the Soviet Repatriation Officers... to the prisoner of war camps and displaced persons assembly centers” and provided them “extraterritorial rights in the assembly centers containing their nationals.” “Hostile Soviet observers were sent to monitor” in the Western Allies zones “the camps where the Eastern Europeans and citizens of the various Soviet republics were” and “these officers visited assembly centers containing their nationals at will... They could imprison their citizens within the assembly centers and shield them from all outside ‘propaganda’; and assure that they would not be exposed to any ‘reactionary’ or ‘capitalistic’ ideas...”<sup>12</sup>

“All Soviet refugees were suspected, as a matter of Soviet policy, of having collaborated with the Germans, and to the Soviet authorities there was no acceptable excuse for Soviet soldier or worker who had allowed himself to be taken prisoner.”<sup>13</sup>

Knowing that from bitter experience, the majority of people from the Eastern Europeans countries and citizens of the various Soviet republics didn’t want to be deported back under the Soviet rule and it was common practice to conceal their Soviet and/or national identity to prevent their return home. “There had ...been so many reasons for the displaced persons to hide their names and origins” that many hid their documents or “had thrown them away” and the survivors used their “ingenuity in assigning themselves, when possible, to the most advantageous classification”<sup>14</sup> by creating for themselves new fictitious names, national origins, and residence history.

“After more than six months of massive transfers” and many ugly episodes with violent outbreaks, and suicides of people who preferred death rather than to be forcibly sent back to the Soviet Union, Western Allied policy at the end of 1945 began to shift away from forcible repatriation. But by that time “more than two million people were transferred to the Soviets.” Soviet Repatriation Officers became aggressive and “have shown themselves increasingly ruthless—actually kidnapping refugees.”<sup>15</sup> According to one account “about 500,000 Russians, ‘escaped the sieve of Yalta accord’ either by their own efforts and subterfuge, bureaucratic fumbling, or the shift in repatriation policy.”<sup>16</sup>

Eleanor Roosevelt, who served from 1945 to 1953 as the United States delegate to the United Nations and in 1947 was elected as a Chairperson of UN Human Rights Commission, wrote on the subject of the East European refugees in Germany, “There were many displaced war refugees in Germany when the Armistice was signed—Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Poles, Czechoslovaks, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, and others—a great number of whom were still living in temporary camps because they did not want to return to live under the Communist rule of their own countries...”

Eleanor Roosevelt commented that after all, “Even Mr. Vishinsky himself acknowledges the lack of freedom in his country... in the book he edited “The Law of the Soviet State” [he acknowledges] that in his state ‘there is and can be no place for freedom of speech, press, and so on, for the foes of socialism,’ ...a so-called freedom ...is for only those supporting the dictates of state.”<sup>18</sup>

Mrs. Roosevelt describes how difficult it was to negotiate with the Soviet block in the United Nations when she was working on the United Nations Committee Three preparing the Human Rights Resolution. The Soviet Union position ...was that “any war refugee who did not wish to return to his country of origin was either a quisling or a traitor to his country” and they argued “that the refugees in Germany should be forced to return home and to accept whatever punishment might be meted out to them.” She

writes, "I felt very strongly on the subject...that large numbers of the refugees were neither quislings nor traitors, and that they must be guaranteed the right to choose whether or not they would return to their homes... and ...we spent countless hours trying to frame some kind of resolution on which all could agree." When this resolution was presented to the UN General Assembly it "was immediately challenged by... the head of the Soviet Union's delegation, Andrei Vishinsky. ...Moscow considered the refugee question of such vital importance that he ...spoke twice before the Assembly."<sup>19</sup>

Eleanor Roosevelt was so impressed by "the controversy with the Communist-dominated countries over the fate of refugees in Germany" that she decided to see for herself "what happened to these many thousands of unfortunate people" and obtained permission to visit and see for herself the refugees which she said was for her "an unforgettable experience." She visited refugee camps near Frankfurt where there were "refugees from Estonia, Poland, Latvia and other countries that were now under Soviet domination and [visited]...the Jewish camps." She describes the conditions in the camps that she visited, "In some... the people lived in old houses but mostly they were in barracks-like buildings with communal kitchens ...some families ...had to hang up blankets to divide off their quarters."<sup>20</sup>

In dealing with the displaced persons in Europe the Eastern European group, dominated by the Soviets, had a single interest in the International Refugee Organization: to deal with "repatriation of as many of their nationals as possible." The Western group agreed that "repatriation was desirable, felt there will be people who do not wish to return to their home countries" and believed that we must "try to prevent any use of force against displaced persons." And Eleanor Roosevelt worked over this and similar questions with the Russians at two meetings of the General Assembly of the United Nations."<sup>21</sup>

In "1946 - Eleanor Roosevelt debated Soviet delegate head, Andrei Vishinsky, regarding WWII refugee repatriation. The General Assembly vote against Vishinsky and Eleanor Roosevelt emerges as the world's foremost spokesperson for human rights."<sup>22</sup>

Mrs. Roosevelt had ...succeeded in getting the refugees of Eastern Europe the ability to freely choose the country in which they desired to re-settle.<sup>23</sup>

But it was too late for the more than 2.75 million of Soviet citizens sent to concentration camps for stays of many years after 1945 when they were handed mostly involuntarily to the Soviets.<sup>24</sup>

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1. Eugene M. Kulischer, *Europe on the Move: War and population Changes, 1917-1947*, (New York, 1948), 305; Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted European Refugees in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1985), 297.

2. Michael R. Marrus, 299, 297.

3. George L. Warren "Post War Migration Problems" in "Research Institute on Peace and Post-War Problems," *Post-War Migrations: Proposals for an International Agency*, (New York, 1943), 38-39; Marrus, 297-299.

4. Malcom J. Proudfoot *European Refugees: 1939-52: A Study in Forced Population Movement*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1956), 158.

5. Marrus, 299; Proudfoot, 158-159.

6. Red Army general Andrei Vlasov who, after being captured by the Germans in mid 1942, had organized hundreds of thousands of men into an anti-Soviet army.

7. An old émigré from the time of Russian Revolution.

8. Marrus, 313-314.

9. Marrus, 299, 314; Proudfoot, 158-159.
10. Marrus, 300, 310; Proudfoot, 167.
11. Marrus, 314-315; Proudfoot, 155.
12. Proudfoot, 155-156.
13. Proudfoot, 128.
14. Marrus, 300; Proudfoot, 179.
15. Marrus, 316-317.
16. Marrus, 317; Elliott, *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America's Role in their Repatriation*, (Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1982), 243.
17. Eleanor Roosevelt, "With the UN in London: Learning the Ropes, *On My Own*, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1958), 49-50; Eleanor Roosevelt, "Learning the Ropes in the UN," *The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt*, (Harper & Brothers, Curtis Publishing, 1958), 307-308.
18. Eleanor Roosevelt, "Reply to Attacks on U.S. Attitude Toward Human Rights Covenant" *Department of State Bulletin*, January 14, 1952, *Courage in a Dangerous World: The Political Writings of Eleanor Roosevelt*, Ed. Allida M. Black, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999), 169)
19. Eleanor Roosevelt, "Learning the Ropes in the UN," *The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt*, (Harper & Brothers, Curtis Publishing 1958), 307-308; Eleanor Roosevelt, "With the UN in London: Learning the Ropes, *On My Own*, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1958), 50-52)
20. Eleanor Roosevelt, *The Autobiography*, 310; Eleanor Roosevelt, "To Germany: To See For Myself, *On My Own*, 54-55).
21. Eleanor Roosevelt, "The Russians Are Tough," *Look*, February 18, 1947; *Courage in a Dangerous World: The Political Writings of Eleanor Roosevelt*, Ed. Allida M. Black, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999), 192-193)
22. A Timeline on Eleanor Roosevelt, <http://pblmm.k12.ca.us/projects/discrimination/Women/WomenThroughYears/aatl.html>.
23. Cecil Ramnaraine, *Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962)*.
24. Marrus, 300, 310; Proudfoot, 167.

## In Limbo

Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

August 23, 1945. On the road to Mannheim.

Our traveling should be coming toward the end<sup>1</sup> but the vagueness of our situation forces us to be constantly in the air. As a matter of fact we should have been remaining in Augsburg for several days more to clarify decision regarding the "Easterners" question. But it happened that we are moving toward Mannheim for another DP camp with a hope that the question pertaining to us will be clarified by that time. Meanwhile we are floating in the air.

Certainly, I like Augsburg's camp for its orderly functioning. There is a mess hall; I work as a teacher; there is some kind of organization; there is care about people. Compared to Hessen where we were before—this is an ideal place for waiting what the Americans will decide to do with us.

But Igor urges to the English Zone. In my opinion, "If you don't know the swamp, don't put your feet into it."<sup>2</sup> In any case, they say that the departure of so-called "those who wish to depart home" should be completed by September 1, 1945. It's very

important for us to know if after the first of September the representatives of the Soviets would be still riding around on the American Zone. The resolution of our question depends on their presence.

Of course, I would like to be in the camp among our people, but at the same time, maybe they will not leave us in this damn Europe. There were rumors about Canada; there was even somewhere a registration for those who wanted to go there.

But all these are only questions to which nobody could give the answer now. The only thing is known that the winter is coming and we are not ready for it—not regarding where we would live, or about our clothing and footwear.

September 8, 1945. Mannheim, Germany.

The things are taking its course. We are already two weeks in Mannheim. On Thursday have arrived in the camp the Americans to organize repatriation of DP's to their Fatherland. After the incident in the camp of DP's resistance to the Soviet agents who tried to force them into their trucks, Americans gave three days to solve the problem of the DP's (That's what they say). On Monday this question should be clarified. We are waiting outside of the camp to see what would happen.

Our money is coming to an end. This doesn't preoccupy Igor. For him, the last pair of pants and worn out shoes, "It's nothing."

We have plenty of free time. I dedicate my free time to pray God to grant salvation and protect the life of my dear ones. I always pray the Almighty for forgiveness of my sins and about salvation of Tonya and Olya.

April 11, 1946 Mannheim, Germany

Today I asked my friend, Dmitry Tschibrischvili,<sup>3</sup> to write a letter<sup>4</sup> to Giulio's parents in Turin, Italy. I asked them if they had heard anything about their son, who remained with my wife and daughter in Laband, Germany. I implored them to communicate to me as soon as possible any news they know about my family. I am hoping that the mail is already functioning between Italy and Germany. Also, my friend didn't know Italian so he wrote in French. I was not sure if Giulio's parents could read and understand French, but, if Giulio did return home, I knew that he would reply immediately.

April 19, 1946. Mannheim, Germany.

I have re-read all I wrote in my travel notebook. It hurts. During this time lots of water is gone under the bridge. But vagueness of our situation in this poor land remains the same. The threat of being deported is not completely eliminated, notwithstanding the conferences, assemblies, meetings, nice speeches, assurances, etc, etc, etc...

Sadness about the loved ones fate remains as a heavy stone the same as it used to be. Only once in a while I think, "Is it worth to suffer? Because my dearest, my closest to me are probably finished to suffer and now are resting somewhere in the common grave... Then why should I, the Cain, wander on this foreign and unneeded soil? You see, there is nothing for what and for whom to live! Everything had sunk into eternity. Only the great sin has remained with me and will accompany me until my last days."

I always pray you, my dearest ones, "Forgive me..."

The second Easter in loneliness. There is no resurrection for me!

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1. Orest M. Gladky, *Putyevoy Zhurnal* [in Russian], [Travelers Notebook, Germany, August-September 1945], Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Also see the chapter "A Man Reborn."

2. Russian proverb: "*Nye znaya brodu, nye suysya v vodu.*"
3. An old immigrant from the days of Russian civil war.
4. Orest M. Gladky, letter to Giulio Verro's parents [in French] Mannheim, Germany, April 11, 1946.

## Genesis

By Orest M. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

We had plenty of free time in the Displaced Persons camps waiting for the Allies to decide what to do with all this mass of people who didn't want to return to the territories destined to remain under the Soviet rule and Communist oppression. Free time was conducive to reflection. I tried to remember exactly when and what happened in my life that brought me to the present situation of having lost both my country and my family. When did it all start that lead me to become a Displaced Person waiting in the limbo of a DP Camp, waiting for someone to decide my future?

And I remembered my youth, my friends, and our noble hearts so full of enthusiasm and spirit of sacrifice—we had to save Russia from the Red terror. It was so vivid in my mind that I couldn't resist to put it on paper. I pulled out my travel notebook from a breast pocket of my tattered and threadbare jacket and wrote what happened on that occasion.

I could see clearly, as if it were only yesterday, a small group of gymnasium students in a big classroom, some sitting on the benches, the others on the teacher's desk or the windowsills...

That day a discussion was called forth by the new atrocity committed the day before by the "Red-skinned," as we, the students, called Bolsheviks. By pure chance I had witnessed the execution of eleven White officers by the Reds who temporarily were occupying our railroad station of Nikitovka. I still remember how I recounted to my friends what had happened minute by minute during that horrible execution, about the horror, the terrible ordeal and suffering that these men endured before their deaths<sup>1</sup>...

That evening my parents and parents of my four school friends, Vadim Kuzenko, Mikhail and Adrian Volkov, and Yasha Malobrodsky, discussed the precarious situation, especially the rumors that the Reds were drafting youth into their army. We listened their discussion that concerned our futures.

Our parents firmly believed that the Whites would prevail and restore order in our country. All parents agreed that their sons should volunteer to defend Russia rather than wait to be drafted by the Red Army and forced to fight for the Bolsheviks.

Since my friends and I had already decided to join the White Army during our meeting in gymnasium, our parents asked us, only boys, to be patient and wait until the Whites would retake Nikitovka and we would then join the Army. The arrival of Whites was expected to be imminent according to the word of mouth on the railroad. Indeed, this happened very soon when one White Army cavalry division retreated south from Kharkov. Vadim Kuzenko's uncle, who was a captain in that division, was temporarily

stationed in Nikitovka in one of the railroad cars. He enrolled us as volunteers in the White Army and immediately assigned us to the military school in Sevastopol. And in the fall of 1919, my four friends and I, with our parents' blessings, departed for military school in Crimea.<sup>2</sup>

Embracing and blessing us before departure, our parents told us, "Defend Russia and don't surrender to Bolsheviks!"

That's how it all started. And now I am here, still paying dearly for a decision made many years ago when I was a lad of sixteen. Now I hate Bolsheviks even more because they made me pay for my youthful decision by keeping my family life and me always on the run from their watchdogs that were so determined to catch and eliminate all their opponents.

So, here I am, hiding in the UNRRA refugee camp from the NKVD agents who are hunting any Soviet citizen who doesn't want to return to their motherland because it is well known that they will be forcefully deported to the Soviet concentration camps for forced labor to pay for their "political sins" of not wanting to return to live under the Bolsheviks' oppression.

We didn't know how the Soviets were able to dupe the Allies to allow them to search DP camps in the American and English zones of occupied Germany and to allow to grab and forcefully deport anyone they suspected to be from the Soviet Union or from the parts of eastern Europe being annexed to it. But it was well known that the NKVD agents were allowed to force the reluctant men, crying women and scared children on the trucks and drive them to the Soviet zone. And in some cases that I heard from the eyewitnesses, they would disguise themselves in American Army uniforms to deceive anyone they considered to be a "political enemy." They would lure the unsuspecting individuals to voluntarily come with them by making them believe that they were wanted for an interview with "the American authorities" and then to abduct them quietly without provoking any suspicion on the part of the victim or anyone in the camp.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See the chapters "Medieval Execution" and "The Noble Hearts."

2. See the chapter "White Army Volunteers."

3. As recounted by Josef Smak, a Slovenian, who was in the UNRRA DP camp and who witnessed such abductions taken place.

*I mused about workings of the Soviet system. Could there be a way that could use its bureaucratic weakness to oversmart it, to turn it against itself? And in that flight of my imagination, in my notebook I wrote a short story, "A Man Reborn."*

-Orest M. Gladky

## A Man Reborn

Orest M. Gladky

Translated by Olga Verro, Edited by Oliver W. Kellogg

The hot summer day had ended. The sun just down. The air still hot, dry and dusty. A man—The Man—in a wrinkled, worn-out gray suit sat at river's edge near a bridge, his visored cap on the grass beside him. The murky water in the mid-summer river barely flowed.<sup>1</sup>

The Man's eyes pensively focus on the horizon. They are vacant eyes; he has driven thought from his mind. Maybe he is tired from the long journey. Or perhaps it is that his mind has wearied from the burden of thoughts of the past. Then it seems to him his being is separating from his body, and in that disembodied state with no heaviness in his heart, he unconsciously allows his exhausted body to rest for just a few moments. Then, with an abrupt hand movement, as if trying to dispel drowsiness, he brushes away the hair which droops on his forehead. His eyes shift to the hypnotic flow of the river.

In my own imagination I transformed myself into This Man and in him allowed to drift the thoughts which tormented me. "Why I come here? To see once more my wife and daughter, even if only from a distance so as to not reopen old wounds. Should I try to see them? Or not? Should I try to go home? Or not?"

My wife and daughter live in this town. They have a roof under which they have some physical comfort. But they bear great sorrow because I, husband and father, am an exile, not by choice. I am trouble to my dear ones. My rare visits bring them deep pain. Would it be better for me to put a final irreversible end to all this. The deepest wounds heal, after all, though heavy scars remain."

And I continued to further imagine I was That Man by the river and what I might have done in his life...

That day The Man walked about forty kilometers. He had not a penny in his pocket, nor a piece of bread in hand. Always, always he lived at risk of seizure by the persecutors. He made this difficult trek for but a single reason, to see once more those dearest faces, and then, perhaps again disappear into unknown, and who knows how long.

Summer dusk descended. The dust slowly settled. The air cooled. Breathing was easier. But The Man's exhausted body remained inert, his legs unresponsive to command. Then, abruptly, The Man realized he must without further delay enter the town. Full dark would envelop him before he reached their house—his house—and conceal him from his loved ones.

His legs, swollen from the hot miles, move slowly, reluctantly but irresistibly toward the home that is not home. As weary steps lead him into the town center he encounters a group of frolicking young people, their carefree antics taking up the entire sidewalk. To avoid unwanted confrontation and attention The Man moves onto the cobble stone roadway. Darkness fast increases and the occasional streetlight begins to feebly illuminate the sidewalk, where people appear to him now as moving silhouettes.

He nears his objective and rehearses his route. It remained only to proceed through the town center, to the square where there is a once-a-church now converted by the Soviets into a cinema theatre, then turn into Railroad Street... and come to the dear house!

"Here I have to be very cautious," The Man thinks, "because I might meet my dearest ones, who could be returning home from somewhere."

What he should do in such a chance encounter is not clear in his mind, so The

Man keeps a watchful eye on passing women, and listens intently to recognize a voice. The few people he meets seem indifferent to his trudging presence.

Finally here is the old, gray wooden fence. Beyond it, farther into the yard, stands a small house. The Man carefully opens the gate to walk cautiously along the brick walkway leading to the house.

He is found out! But it is the white and fluffy Spitz dog, Kashtan, who bounds toward the Man in joyous recognition, but silently as if he knows the need for secrecy. Kashtan only rubs against The Man, nuzzles the dusty shoes, then stretches upward to nose The Man's hands, which gently pet the dog, though his mind is not on the four-legged household guard.

The Man hurries, quietly, toward the small, brightly illuminated window. The shutters are still open; a stream of light flows into the night, revealing the flower garden cultivated for delight and pleasure by the loving hands of his daughter.

"In this garden," The Man asks himself, "had she unburdened herself of heavy and painful thoughts about the father who was so close in heart but so far away... somewhere so far away? Maybe this very flowerbed was watered with tears that nourished and brought to bloom these beautiful sweet-scented flowers, this rosebush, tears that flowed with love of the two women for The Man, husband and father, a man not dead nor buried but still gone into another world..."

Still hidden in shadow The Man moved closer to peak through the window to observe the life inside. Near the window at the desk sat his wife. Sinking heart aching, he thought, "She has become much older; the wrinkles on her face are deeper..." A lock of hair gleaming silver; the glasses made her face look thinner.

She worked with strained attention. Books and notes were on the desk. Intermittently her hand dipped her pen toward the inkwell, revealing the flash of her wedding ring. "Breaking the rules of Soviet society, she continued to wear it," he thought.

Suddenly The Man clearly heard a voice. "Probably the porch door is open," he thought, "I should be more careful." Maintaining his silence he hid himself in the wild grapevines descending the porch side. He listened.

"Well, *Mamusya*,<sup>2</sup> the tea is ready," said the daughter. "Stop working and let us drink tea with tasty preserves."

"One moment, little one."

For a moment there was silence, then tinkling of cups and saucers. Again the voices were heard now from the kitchen where wife and daughter drank tea.

"Mama, dear, tell me about Papa. Why he is not with us?"

"Lyalya, I have already told you, that is how it is and that is how it must be. Father cannot be with us any more. The time will come when you will learn why, but for now I will tell you nothing, neither lies nor truth."

"But when, finally, will I find out, *Mamochka*?<sup>3</sup> Papa's image I see always in my mind. Because of him I try to do everything the best I can, to study and to work. But I always wonder why other fathers are with their families, but my father... Where is he? I don't know."

"What else can we do, *Lyalyechka*?<sup>4</sup> That's how things have turned out in our lives. It had to be this way. Console yourself that we are better off than your father—we have a roof, a piece of bread to eat. But he? ... We don't know..." her voice faded into silence.

The Man's thoughts churned in nervous upheaval. He longed to be in the house.

His tiredness and pain were gone. His heart yearned for his loved ones. But had strength of will to refuse his heart, to remain outside their lives and not reopen the wounds and sorrows of his departure and absence. It was this will which kept him concealed in the dusty leaves of the wild grape vines, and out of his house.

The talk in the house stopped and he heard only the clatter of dishes. The Man thought, "No! There must be an end to this foolish thinking of mine." And he cautiously but decisively freed himself from the vines, for one more glimpse through the window of his wife and daughter, now 18 years old and grown up. Blinded by the emotion he turned from the window, stepped lightly onto the grass and walked with determination toward the gate.

The Man pondered, "Why do I try to save myself? Why should I worry them? They have a deep wound. It will never heal. So why pick it open, make it even deeper? These are my choices," The Man pondered, "Either I must somehow be born again, or I must perish. No! It is not possible to exist live like this any longer. No!"

The town fell silent. From the town center the frolicking young people returned to their homes. Infrequently, security guards moved watchfully among the shops. The Man crossed the Square to the small public garden. He sat on the bench, hoping to rest. And to forget.

But new thoughts coursed helter-skelter through his brain and he had no strength to quiet them or to quell the torment in his soul. Fretfully, he paced from bench to bench, until finally, after restless hours, he seized on a singular idea: end his present exile life and be reborn in this same God's world...It was a wild idea that fired his brain but he could see no other way. And it might work.

"To live or not to live? To be or not to be?" He continued to ponder. "I cannot exist this way longer; I must appear anew in this world. If the path to execution of rebirth be painful for me, so be it. But after that I would be able to exist unhindered in the very same country that now refuses to allow me a life."

Abruptly The Man rose from the bench, reached into his trousers, pulled out a pocketknife and resolutely strode toward the shops lining the Square. Peering intently into the dark, he could make out the outline of a security guard who lay asleep on the wide sill of a shop window. The Man went directly to the door of that shop, fumbled for its padlock and began to pick in its keyhole with his pocketknife.

The shop guard still slept. For a moment The Man felt terror at his own brazen action but gathered his resolve and to speed his plan to fruition he sharply jerked the padlock. The rattle of metal brought the shop guard sharply to his feet to throw himself on The Man and scream for help. Other guards scurry to help and several hands grab The Man.

There is confusion among the guards when The Man is silent to their questions, but after brief consultation among themselves they lead him to the local office of militia.

At the militia desk in wrinkled uniform sits a young, red-haired fellow with a short, turned-up nose. He listlessly listens to the guards, glances at his watch, then addresses The Man.

"Were you going to commit a burglary?"

"Yes," The Man replies.

The red-haired militia functionary produces a printed form of interrogation protocol and begins questioning the criminal and the witnesses, the shop guards.

However, it is quickly apparent that this limb of the law is troubled not at all by the bizarre personal information given to him by the criminal. He questions, then writes, with no thought given to what the responses of the criminal might imply. To him the words seem to be without meaning, just words, words to write on a form.

"Name?"

"Ukrop [Dill]."

"Patronymic name?"

"Pomidorovich [Tomatovich]."

"Last name?"

"Ogurtsov [Cucumbers]."

After all the formalities were observed the criminal was placed in a cell for temporary detention.

"Idiots," The Man thought, "they didn't even beat me up. If everything will go this smoothly I will be turned officially into completely-processed-by-protocol Potato. Maybe even more! This process will give me a birth certificate into this God's world. Now I am officially Ukrop Pomidorovich Ogurtsov!" Tiredness took over and he fell soundly asleep on the hard bench.

In about two weeks the trial was held. The Man was condemned to one year in prison for a nebulous, undefined crime and under no known penal law. But most strangely, as he was processed through many justice departments and penitentiaries he was never asked the obvious intelligent question, "What's the devil! ... What kind of a name is this, Ukrop Pomidorovich Ogurtsov [Dill Tomatovich Cucumbers]?"

Thus, into God's world was born a new citizen, who in the not so distant past was a political fugitive, who in the present is a confessed criminal serving the time of his sentence, but who in the future will be a free citizen of his country.

His criminal past is the sure guarantee of an undisturbed future life in the Soviet Union. The Man learned this fact through the long years of observation and bitter experience in life; it confirmed this basic formula not only in his own life but also in the whole Soviet State.

All that The Man had long searched for came about so easily and relatively quickly. He was, finally, to be able to be with his family again. And my own imagination of being transformed into The Man has given my mind and soul blessed relief from the terrible thoughts that were overwhelming my soul...

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*Re-reading the story, I was surprised that the idea had not come to mind sooner, maybe right after I returned home from the White Army, since all my adult life I had been running to evade the clutches of CheKa, GPU, KGB, and NKVD.*

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1. Orest M. Gladky, "Rozhdyeniye chelovyeka" [in Russian], *Sapishnaya Knizhka* [Notebook kept during a journey across Germany, June-July 1945], trans. by Olga Gkady Verro, ed. by Oliver W. Kellogg. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro. Also see the chapter "Woe Is Me!"

2. Endearing diminutive of Mama.

3. Diminutive of Mama.

4. Endearing diminutive of Lyalya.

## Part Thirteen

### Mother Hiding in Poland



# Suddenly I Remained Alone

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

I still remember that Monday, October 1, 1945. I got up early in the morning and could hear Lala and Giulio in their bedroom talking. Suddenly I realized that today was the day that they were waiting for so long, the day that a few weeks ago seemed to be only a dream for them. Today they were departing with the Red Cross convoy train<sup>1</sup> repatriating the Italian prisoners of war<sup>2</sup> in Germany.

My feelings were mixed. As any mother, I was concentrating more on matters of her safety, while my daughter gave importance only to her sentimental feelings. But her and my goals did coincide.

She wanted to remain together with the young man she was in love with and who loved her. And they both desired that their child would grow up with a mother and a father.

I was happy that she was in love and was loved by a fine man and that now they had a good chance to remain together with my grandchild having both parents. But I was also grateful to Giulio, and to the destiny that was making it possible for my daughter and her child to escape the misfortune of being deported back to the Soviet Union, where for sure she could expect the life of hardship, sacrifice, and heavy labor, and bleak future in some concentration camp in a remote part of the country.

But the happiness about the brighter future of my daughter was mixed with the apprehension about what would happen to me once they were gone. I had, of course, the chance to find Giulio's good friend Rufin, who promised him and my daughter to give me a refuge in his home,<sup>3</sup> but there were too many uncertainties to be sure this could become a reality.

I was distracted from my thoughts by the practical chores. I packed for Lala and Giulio as much food as I could find in the kitchen to give them for their journey. Then I prepared a good breakfast and for perhaps the last time ever all three of us sat together at the table to eat.

Giulio was very excited and happy that he finally could go home with Lala. He caressed and kissed her several times with tenderness and affection and she kissed him back with intense fondness and devotion. I felt reassured that I was doing the right thing to entrust my daughter to him. It was more than a year that he courted her and the last nine months he lived with us. I had plenty of time to know him and to see that he loved Lala and there was no doubt that she was in love with him. I felt certain that he would make her happy and would take good care of her and of my grandchild.

When we were dressed and ready to go, I asked Lala and Giulio to sit down for a few minutes, as it was a Russian custom to do this for good luck before a journey. Although our neighbors who lived on the first floor were used to hearing us going to the market very early in the morning, I warned Lala and Giulio to walk as quietly as possible on the staircase, just in case they would become curious. We tiptoed down the stairs, so

the Izsorski family would not peek from the door and become suspicious that we were departing with so much luggage. I believed that the less they knew, the better it was for all of us.

On our way to Katowitz we spoke only French, to be sure that we didn't make a mistake and speak Russian at the station before departure. There were so many things that needed to be said, but all that I could think about was to tell Lala and Giulio to write me immediately from Prague and from Italy, and when the baby was born. And Lala reminded me about contacting Rufin immediately.

At the station in Katowitz many Soviet soldiers were on the platform near the Red Cross train and one stood near each car door. To prevent suspicion, Lala and I said good-bye in French and tried to hide our emotions and tears. As Giulio kissed me good-bye he told me, "*Maman*, take good care of you." And I told him, "And you take good care of my daughter and my grandchild."

I watched with trepidation as the Red Cross man checked their documents. I worried that something could go wrong until the last moment when they boarded the train. When I saw Giulio help Lala climb the high steps into the car, I took a deep breath of relief.

After a few minutes one window opened and Lala came to the window, then another window opened and Giulio appeared in it. They waved to me and I could hear them saying in French, "*Au revoir, Maman*."<sup>4</sup> I continued to repeat, "*Ecrive moi! Au revoir*."<sup>5</sup>

It seemed to me that it was too soon after our arrival to the station, I heard the whistle of a conductor and the train began to move. Lala and Giulio were waving and I was waving back and continued to wave long after they disappeared from my sight. Only then I saw that everybody was leaving the platform and I followed them.

When I was in the train returning to Laband and was surrounded by many people sitting next to me, in front of me, and standing in the passageway, I suddenly felt all-alone.

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1. See the chapter "Repatriation of Italian Prisoners of War."

2. See the chapter "Italian Armistice."

3. See the chapter "Three Thousand Zloty Solution."

4. "Good-bye, Mama" [in French].

5. "Write to me. Good-bye" [in French].

## Decisions, Decisions, Decisions...

As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

I knew that now I had to make a lot of decisions all by myself and had to act quickly if I wanted to evade deportation to the Soviet Union. I had several things that needed to be settled before I would call Giulio's friend Rufin. I decided that the first thing I had to do was to move out of the apartment, so Izsorski would not send the Polish men to force me out.

The second thing to do was to sell, or to give away to somebody, all that coal that Giulio so faithfully moved from one apartment to another. I definitely would not leave it to Izsorski after all that trouble he caused us! Then the bright idea flashed through my mind, "Maybe I could combine the two of these problems together. I probably could find somebody to take me for a short time in their home in exchange for all that coal. Why don't I try to ask about it our Polish neighbors who live in the house next to ours?"

On my return to Laband, before going to my apartment, I went straight to our Polish neighbors and offered them a bargain that they could not refuse, to let me stay for a very short time in their home in exchange for the coal that was sufficient for them for the whole winter. The neighbor came with me to the shed and checked how much coal I really had. "*Pani*,"<sup>1</sup> he said to me right there on the spot, "tomorrow morning get your things ready, my son and I will help you to move to our home. We have a room that you can have all for yourself. I will tell my wife to get it ready for you." I couldn't believe how easily I had solved these two problems.

The next day very early in the morning our neighbor came with his son and moved all my belongings to their house. Izsorski and his wife were surprised to see our neighbor helping me to move.

Madam Izsorski asked me, "Are you leaving?"

I gave her a short answer, "No. I am moving next door."

I think only then she realized that Lala and Giulio were not there and that I was alone. When Mister Izsorski went to work, I told my neighbor to begin immediately moving our coal from the shed to his place. He even used our cart that Giulio used to move the coal so many times.

Madam Izsorski tried to talk to me again, but I responded that I was too busy. When her husband came home for lunch he had a big surprise, most of the coal was already moved. I was sure that when he tried to evict us from our apartment he was counting that our coal would remain for him. I had my revenge for his trickery to evict us from the apartment.

Another important thing I had to do as soon as possible was to return to Lyudmila Larionovna<sup>2</sup> a gold coin that she gave me to barter for a gold jewelry at the jeweler in Katovitz, as I did for her several times before.<sup>3</sup> I had to tell her that I had moved to the house next door and that I was planning to quit going to the market.

In a few days, as soon as I settled down in my room, I decided to try to see her. I put on my brown coat that the German seamstress made for me with very deep pockets, which I asked her to make to keep secure my money on the market. I wrapped the gold coin in a small handkerchief and put it in the right pocket.

Then, I went to walk back and forth across the street from the NKVD camp fence, as I did when I wanted to see her after the new Repatriation Division arrived in the camp. After their arrival Lyudmila Larionovna became cautious and according to our latest agreement she was coming to our apartment to retrieve her goods. At this time I needed to see her and tried for several days to walk there, hoping that she could see me from the dispensary windows and would come out. But she didn't expect me and all my efforts were without success. All this time that I was trying to see her, I kept the gold coin in my coat pocket.

Now that I was out of our apartment, the Izsorski family had the whole house for themselves and I thought that he would not send any more Polish men from the Town

Hall to bother me. My landlord and his wife were treating me well, their teenage son was respectful to me, and the room was comfortable. Therefore, I didn't feel that I had to hurry in contacting Rufin.

After the hurried departure of Lala and Giulio, I was left with all our remaining possessions that we didn't sell or barter for food during the nine months that we lived under the occupation by the Soviet Army. This included what we brought with us from our home in the Ukraine, what we accumulated during more than a year-and-half of our residency in Laband under the German rule, plus many things from our neighbors' apartment that they left to us when they escaped from the advancing Soviet Army. I estimated that by selling it little by little on the market in Katowitz it could provide me with food for some time.

Since it was impossible to carry all of it on the train and on the streetcar, I had to do plenty of sorting and packing. I estimated that it would take me about two weeks to get ready. Therefore, I decided that about the middle of October would be about the right time for me to begin moving my belongings from Laband to Rufin's home. I thought that if I would do it myself and take very little luggage, as if I were going to the market, it would not raise any suspicion from my landlord and the Izsorski family. I decided that I would notify Rufin when I went to Katowitz and at that time would give him some of my luggage. Then I would make several trips taking little by little, the rest of my belongings to his home. I thought through my plan, rehearsing it in my mind several times, and it seemed to be a very reasonable, safe, and inconspicuous way of moving from Laband, since for many months my neighbors were used to see me going to the market in Katowitz.

For almost two weeks I gradually sorted and washed my clothing, lingerie, towels, and bed linen, neatly folded them and placed them in piles ready to be packed in the suitcases. My suit and the two coats I left hanging on the coat rack to keep them from wrinkling.

In the evening, on October 13, I finally finished with this long task and was very tired. I decided to leave the rest of the packing for tomorrow. But, after it seemed that everything was going so well, a very scary episode was waiting for me that evening.

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1. "Missis" [in Polish].
  2. Doctor in the NKVD camp in Laband.
  3. See the chapter "Three Thousand Zloty Solution."

## The Gold Coin

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

In the evening, on October 13, my landlord showed to my room two NKVD agents who were looking for me. They didn't knock, or ask permission to enter; they just barged in without saluting me, or introducing themselves. But I knew the NKVD uniforms, which became familiar to me when I worked in the NKVD camp.

As soon as they got in through the door one of them, looking at the neat piles of

clothing and linen lying around the room, asked me, "Are you moving somewhere?"

"No, I just moved into this room." I answered slowly and thought, "They came to take me for deportation to the Soviet Union."

But, instead, the agent gave me an order, "Give us the gold coins!" He said it in such authoritative tone of voice, like he didn't expect "No" for an answer.

I was very surprised to hear it and asked him, "What gold coins?"

"Those given to you by the officers from the NKVD camp," provokingly replied the agent.

"I have no gold coins." I replied with such calm that even I was surprised, because inside I was trembling from fear like a lonely leaf remaining on the branch in the winter.

"Well," he exclaimed with arrogance, "then we shall find them ourselves! Let's begin the search!" he ordered to other agent, who stood silently near the door.

The first thing they searched was my pocketbook and didn't pay attention to a big bundle of Polish zloty that I had from selling all the items that neither my daughter nor I wanted to take with us when we would leave Laband. They searched everywhere and everything in the room thoroughly, demonstrating that they were experts in this work. They searched each item in all piles, going methodically from one to another, and messed up all my careful folding.

I sat quietly on the chair trying to maintain my external calm. In my mind I was asking myself, "How they know that I have the gold coin that belongs to the doctor from the NKVD camp? If they should find it, shall I tell them, or not, that it belongs to Lyudmila Larionovna? What I will tell her if they take it from me?"

I froze from internal fear when they began to search the jacket and the coats hanging on the coat rack. They fingered them inch by inch beginning at the collar, going inside the pockets and proceeding to press between their hands down to the hem. As one of the agents began to search my brown coat I turned my head away to look toward the window, because I was afraid that they would detect my apprehension. I expected every moment some kind of jubilant exclamation that they had found the gold coin. After several long minutes of waiting, and hearing no comments from the agents, I looked back at the coat rack. The agents were not there, they were already searching my suitcase. "They didn't find it! They didn't find it! They didn't find it!" pounded in my head while I tried to maintain my calm composure.

But the NKVD agents appeared very disappointed that they didn't find any gold coins they were searching for. The agent that did all the talking came very close to me; looking sternly into my eyes and showing that he was losing his temper. he asked rudely, "Where did you hide the gold coins?"

"I don't have any gold coins," I answered now without hesitation.

"Well, if you don't tell us, then we have to bring you for interrogation to NKVD quarters." And he ordered me, "Let's go!"

I grabbed quickly from the rack my other lighter coat and purse with my documents and followed him, while the other agent walked behind me. The Polish landlord and his wife were standing in the kitchen near the open door and watching with fear as I was led away by the NKVD agents.

I thought they might take me to the NKVD camp office in the building where I worked before, and if so hoped that I would see *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov and maybe

he would rescue me. Instead, they took me to another building, where apparently were the separate offices of the new Repatriation unit, about whom *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov warned Lyudmila Larionovna to be careful. Since they were in charge of repatriation of the Soviet citizens, obviously their offices were separated from the offices where I worked before.

The agents handed me to the guard that was in charge of the prisoners and told him, "Lock her in!" The guard led me to the basement, then through dark corridor, and locked me in a small room. There were no windows, only a small electric light high on the ceiling illuminated the room, which was empty except for a wooden bunk bed without mattress and a metal pail in the corner. I sat on the bed and waited, for what seemed to me very long hours. It was cold and humid and I couldn't stop shivering.

Then I heard steps in the hall and the same guard brought me a warm soup in an aluminum container, but no spoon. I asked him, "When I will be interrogated?"

"Aunty," answered the guard, "maybe tomorrow. All officers are gone for the day. There is nobody here, but you and me." And he locked the door again. The soup, which I had to drink from the container, warmed me inside, and I stopped shivering.

I had plenty of time to think about my strategy on how to behave and what to tell during the interrogation if, of course, I would have one. I decided to be firm and to deny that I have the gold coin. I reasoned, "If they didn't find it during the search, they don't have any evidence against me and against Lyudmila Larionovna. If I talk, we both will be in trouble." And with this definite idea in my mind I fell asleep on the hard bunk bed.

In the morning the guard brought me a cup of hot tea. Then another guard came and told me to follow him. He led me through the dark corridor and up the stairs to the first floor where he stopped at one door. He knocked and when we heard a loud "Da!"<sup>1</sup> he opened the door and let me in the room.

After being all night in the barely lighted room, the bright sunlight from the window blinded me, I covered my eyes with my hand and remained standing near the door. I heard a hard voice in front of me, "Come here and sit down!"

"Sorry," I replied apologetically, "but I cannot see where to go. The bright light blinded me."

The interrogator didn't pay any attention to my excuse and began to question me. "Are you Russian? What is your name?"

I replied promptly, "Yes, I am from the Ukraine. My name is Antonina Gavriyllovna Gladkaya."<sup>2</sup>

The interrogator changed his voice to accusatory, asking me the next question, "Why are you remaining in Laband when all Soviet citizens from this town have departed home?"

I removed my hand from my eyes, feeling that I had become used to the bright light, and saw a chair standing in front of a big desk. I walked a few feet and sat down. With the bright light shining in my eyes I couldn't see the face of my interrogator.

"Well," I began slowly, "in the beginning of February I was drafted by the two officers from this NKVD camp to work as an interpreter<sup>3</sup> and to register German men that were being deported to the Soviet Union. I continued to work in the NKVD camp when the census of the Soviet citizens living in the hamlet of Laband was taking place and when they were sent back to the Soviet Union."

"Ah!" he exclaimed and asked again, "Who were the officers that you have

worked for?"

I answered promptly, "*Polkovnik* Stepanov and *Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov who is still here in the camp, and my direct superior was Captain Komov."

"Ah!" the interrogator with the invisible to me face exclaimed again, and asked, "Do they know that you are still here?"

"Of course!" I replied reassuringly. "*Podpolkovnik* Kozhevnikov knows that now I am waiting when my daughter and her husband, who is an Italian, will return from the Consulate in Prague, where he went to apply for a visa to go with us to the Ukraine."

"Why they had to go all the way to Prague?" he wondered. "Why didn't they go Warsaw?"

"Oh, they had been there, but were told that they need to go to Prague to have his passport from the Italian Consulate," I invented an impromptu answer.

"Ah! Why your daughter married a foreigner?"

I gave him the answer, like it was very obvious thing that could happen to the young couple, "They fell in love with each other!"

Seemingly the interrogator was satisfied with my simple answer and he did not ask me anything more about my daughter.

After a few moments of silence he asked me, "Where is your husband?"

My heart almost stooped, as in my head flashed the suspicion that they have him here in the camp. But I gave him the truthful answer, "I don't know where he is. Probably in the army, if he is alive."

"Ah!" he exclaimed and began to knock the pen on the desk, as he was trying to find what he should ask me next. Then he said affirmatively, "So, they know about you here in the camp?"

"Yes, they know." I said calmly.

Then the interrogator asked somewhat hesitantly, "Do you know the woman doctor from the camp?"

"Of course, I know her!" I answered. "She was there all the time when I worked there." And I thought, "Now he will start to ask me about the gold coins."

But he continued, "Tell me what you know about her."

"I know that her name is Lyudmila Larionovna, as everybody was calling her in the camp, but I don't know her last name. She is a good doctor and a very fine young woman."

"Do you know how she manages to have the money to buy fine things for her?"

"I don't know," I answered. "Probably she is receiving a good salary as a military doctor."

"What else do you know about her as a person?" he insisted.

"When I worked in the camp we were all the time very busy in processing German men and we didn't have time to talk with anybody. I know her only as a doctor, a very good doctor. I do not know anything else about her. She never talked with me about her personal life."

"Ah!" the interrogator emitted again his obviously habitual exclamation. I felt that he wanted to know more details about her, but at the same time, for some reason, he was very cautious. I decided that it was better not to tell him anything more, unless he asked for some specific information. If I did that it should not be harmless to her or me.

The interrogator abruptly stopped questioning me and called loudly, "Guard!"

I couldn't believe the interrogation was over and that he had not asked me anything about the gold coin. I got up promptly from the chair before he changed his mind. The guard entered the room. My interrogator ordered, "Put this woman back in the cellar." I walked out without saying anything that could hurt Lyudmila Larionovna or me to the man who interrogated me and whose face I never saw.

They kept me in the basement for three days and didn't interrogate me any more. Staying in that cold and humid room I got a sore throat, but they fed me well with the familiar food that we were receiving before from the camp's kitchen.

After the three days of being locked up in the cold and humid basement the guard came and took me from my cell, telling me that he received an order to let me go home. As I walked through the dark corridor and up the stairs I wondered, "Is it for good that they let me go home? Now they will be watching me and could at any time grab me and send me home."

Outside the building was waiting the NKVD automobile and the guard told me to get in. I was surprised and began to suspect that it might be some trick, but could not imagine where they could take me from here. As I closed the door after me, the soldier driver asked me where I lived and drove me to my home.

It remained a mystery for me why they send me home in the automobile, except that maybe they didn't want anybody in the camp to see me walking from their building.

During these three days of being locked up I had plenty of time to make my plans for the immediate future. I decided that, if they let me go free, I should immediately return the gold coin to Lyudmila Larionovna.

I entered my room and right away removed my wrinkled coat in which I slept three nights and put on my brown coat. I put my hand in the right pocket to touch the gold coin that I kept there wrapped in a small handkerchief. It was not there. I checked in the left pocket, just to be sure maybe I didn't remember in what pocket I have put it. The left pocket was empty too. "Well," I thought, "if the NKVD agents didn't find it, then somebody else did". There was no one else, but my Polish landlord, his wife, and their teenage son in the house. One of them had taken it.

I went right away in the kitchen where both husband and wife were sitting at the table. "*Pani*," I spoke to the wife, "they released me on one condition that I bring right away the gold coin to the NKVD camp. But in my absence the gold coin disappeared; it was in this coat's pocket. There was no one else in the house, but your husband, you, and your son. One of you took it. Please give it back."

The wife looked at her husband as if expecting him to give me some answer, but he was listening and not saying anything. I began to implore them, "If I don't bring it back right away, they will come again and arrest and maybe kill me. But they also will search the whole house, and this time they shall not leave until they find it. And you will be in a big, big trouble when they find it, because they would consider that you were helping me to hide it."

Hearing this, the wife became very upset and started to talk nervously in Polish to her husband trying to convince him. I understood that he had taken the gold coin and I left the task of persuading him to his wife.

"*Pani*," I said again, "I beg you, they will kill me, but they will put your house upside down to find the gold coin. And who knows what NKVD agents could do to you, or to your husband! That coin is not worth having all that trouble for you."

The wife was now scared of what could happen to them and changed her way of talking to her husband from persuading him to insisting that he return the coin to me. Finally he got up, went in their bedroom and returned with the gold coin still wrapped up in my handkerchief and silently handed it to me. I put it in my coat pocket, and without saying anything, right away walked out of the house.

I decided to try again to see Lyudmila Larionovna. I walked back and forth across the road from the NKVD camp fence hoping that she could see me from a dispensary. My persistence paid off and she came out. She stopped on the grass near the camp fence and didn't cross the road and said, "Good day, Antonina Gavriylovna. What happened? Let's not stand while we are talking." We both began to walk back and forth, she on the grass along the camp's fence, and I, across the road along the hamlet buildings.

I told her the whole story, "Three days ago the new NKVD agents from this camp came to my room and asked me to give them the gold coins. How could they know that I had your gold coin? I told them that I didn't have any gold coins. They searched everything in my room. I had your gold coin wrapped up in a handkerchief in the right pocket of the coat I am wearing now. It has very deep pockets. We were lucky that they didn't find it. But they arrested me and kept me three day in the basement of a building where are the offices of the new NKVD unit which I had never seen when I worked there."

"One officer interrogated me and asked me many questions about me and why I didn't depart home with all the other Soviet citizens. I told him that we worked in this NKVD camp when they took census and deported all Soviet citizens. The officer asked me with whom I worked in this camp and I told him the names of all officers that I knew. I didn't mention your name. Then he asked me if the officers I worked for know that I am in Laband and I told him, 'Yes, they know.'

"Then he asked me why I am not going home now that I don't work any more in the camp. I explained that I am waiting for my daughter and her husband to get visa from the Soviet Consulate in Prague to go with us to Ukraine."

Lyudmila Larionovna interrupted me, "Olga and Giulio finally went to Prague? I hope they find there a solution to remain together."

I replied, "I hope so too."

After this interruption I continued to tell her about the interrogation, "Suddenly the interrogator changed the subject and asked me if I knew the camp's doctor and ordered me to tell him everything about you. I told him that I knew you only as a doctor and nothing else."

Lyudmila Larionovna said, "That impudent man! He is angry with me, because I rejected his advances to be his lover. Now he is trying to collect the dirt about me. He heard rumors about the gold coins and ordered to search us in the camp too. I was lucky that you had it."

"Really?" I asked. "Then they knew that I was doing business for you. It is better that I don't do any more bartering with your gold coins. It will be dangerous for you and for me."

"You are right," agreed Lyudmila Larionovna and added, "But since they didn't find it, they would not search you or me again."

"I hope so too," I replied. "I brought your gold coin back to you. It is wrapped in a handkerchief. I will put it here on the grass and would walk away. You come here and

take it."

"All right. But listen, I think that it will be safer that we don't see each other for a while," she suggested.

"I agree. But if you need me, I live now in the house next to where I lived before. Good-bye, Lyudmila Larionovna!"

"Thank you, Antonina Gavriylovna, for being such a good friend. And I am very sorry that you had to stay three days in the cellar. Good-bye!"

I placed the gold coin wrapped in my handkerchief on the grass at the edge of the road and slowly walked away. When I looked back, she was already walking to the camp's gate. This was my last encounter with the NKVD camp's doctor.

As I walked home, I decided that, if I wanted to remain in Poland, now was the time for me to disappear from Laband, where it was known that I was a Soviet citizen. I returned to my room and began quickly to pack my belongings.

I remembered that the daughter of my Polish landlord lived in Zabrze, the same town where Rufin was working in the Town Hall. The wife of my landlord has recounted to me that their daughter had had a hard time to take care of her two-and-half-year old boy. She was working, but it was not easy for her while she was waiting for her husband to return home from Germany. This gave me the idea that maybe it was possible to stay a few days with her before I contacted Rufin. I thought, "It does not cost anything to ask."

I went right away to the kitchen, where both husband and wife were sitting at the table and told them, "I gave to the NKVD the gold coin. But I don't know what will happen next. I believe that it is better for me and for you that I go away from here as soon as possible." I saw relief on their faces and they agreed with me wholeheartedly. I asked them straightforwardly, "Do you think that your daughter in Zabrze could give me a place to stay for a very short time? I shall pay her well for her hospitality."

Husband and wife consulted with each other and husband said, "*Pani*, my wife and I think that our daughter will be glad to have you. My son could help you to transport your luggage on your cart all the way to Zabrze to her apartment if you pay him something. When *Pani* wants to leave?"

I didn't expect such a good offer that would solve my problem of moving all my possessions out of Laband. Before they could change their minds I quickly replied, "Very early tomorrow morning." I warned them though, "It will be better for you and for your daughter that, if the NKVD agents or anybody else, especially the neighbor Izsorski, would ask you where I was going from here, you tell them that I went to Katowice to take the train home to Ukraine." They agreed to this condition.

I finished packing before evening and went to bed early, anticipating the long trip tomorrow morning. Besides, I needed a rest. My body was aching all over from sleeping three nights on the hard bunk bed; I had the sore throat from staying in the humid NKVD cellar; and most of all I was exhausted from the three days of tension and fear.

On October 17, 1945 early in the morning the teenage son of my landlord carried my luggage into the courtyard and tied it down with cord to the cart. Both husband and wife got up early to see me off. I thanked them both for their hospitality and help and told them that I left in the room my furniture, pots and pans and dishes, which were too heavy to carry, and that they could have them with my compliments.

Everybody in my landlord family felt relieved when I departed. And, of course, I was happy to be able so quickly to leave Laband. Slowly we began our journey to Zabrze.

1. "Yes" [in Russian].
2. Russian spelling of the feminine surname Gladky.
3. See the chapter "NKVD Lager In Laband."

## Refuge in the Home of Rufin and Lidia

**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

As the day was breaking, the young Polish boy and I slowly began our journey from Laband.<sup>1</sup> The teenage son of my landlord pulled the cart with all my belongings and I walked beside him.<sup>2</sup> We traveled by foot on the country roads and on the streets of villages and towns, all the way to the town of Zabrze.<sup>3</sup>

It was a very tiring trip that took us all day. We stopped many times to rest, to drink water and to eat some food that I took with me. We were lucky that it was not a very cold day and it was not raining, which is very common in this region at that time of the year.

Late in the evening we arrived at our destination to the apartment of boy's older sister in the town of Zabrze. We were both exhausted. The boy explained to his sister that her father and mother sent me to stay with her, and I promised to pay her well for her hospitality. The young woman accepted me without reservations. I had some food brought with me and I shared it that evening with the boy and his sister. She prepared the ersatz coffee, for which I had offered sugar, because she had none.

That evening my hostess and I got acquainted a little with each other. But her brother and I were so tired that we excused ourselves very early in the evening and asked her to show us where she will put us for the night. As we put our heads on the pillows, in a few minutes we were sound asleep.

The next morning I paid the boy for his service and gave him money for the tickets to return home on the streetcar and the train. Before the young woman left for work we sat at the table to drink the ersatz coffee and she fed her two-and-half-years old son.

Looking at her I thought that it would be better that a Polish woman would go to see Rufin at the Town Hall. I asked my hostess, "Could you do me a big favor? Before you return home from work could you stop at the Town Hall? I need that you see a good friend of my family, Rufin Swizsi, who works there. Tell him that Giulio's mother-in-law had arrived in town yesterday evening and is staying with you in your apartment. Ask him if he could come to see me as soon as possible and give him your address."

She graciously agreed to it and asked me if I could take care of her son to save her money that she pays the woman who keeps him while she is at work. I agreed to this exchange of favors. When she returned home she told me, "It was easy to find him. He promised to come and see you tomorrow after work."

While she was away during the day, she left one potato to make a puree for her son. I had my food for lunch, which I shared with him and gave the boy some sweetened water to drink as I had my ersatz coffee.

When I tried to find in her kitchen the provisions to prepare the sup-per, I saw

that she had almost nothing on the shelves, except a couple of potatoes that she probably kept for her boy. I used my supplies to cook for that evening. She came home only with a piece of bread. The young woman was most grateful for the supper I prepared. I remembered that her mother told me about the hard time her daughter had.

At the table and during the evening she recounted to me about her life. She was a simple Polish young woman who during the nine months of occupation of her country by the Soviet Army became very skinny from food deprivation but still looked healthy and attractive in her youthful simplicity.

She told me, "My husband is German. He was badly wounded on the Russian front. After he recuperated, he was assigned to work in this town. We have fallen in love and got married. When the Soviet Army came close to our town, he was called, as all German men, in the civil defense unit, which retreated into Germany. And I remained here with our son.

I am waiting for my husband to return home soon, because someone told me that they saw him alive somewhere in Germany; but so far I had no news from him." She emitted a deep sigh and concluded, "He was a very nice man; he would never abandon me and our son whom he adored."

Then she asked me anxiously, "Do you think that Polish government would allow the German men who lived here to return to their families?"

"It is hard to guess," I answered, "because now the borders are controlled not by the Polish, but by the Soviet Army who is allowing going through only the people they want." Then I had consoled her, "Maybe it is better that he is in Germany. You have probably a better chance to reunite with him sooner than if he was here. Do you know that all German men that remained in Poland were taken by the Soviets to work in the Soviet Union? Who knows if all those men would ever return home?"

The young woman listened to me, as if I was an oracle giving her hope for the future. "Thank you, *Pani*, for your good words," she said with real gratitude.

The next day Rufin came to see me after work. It was the first time that I met him, except, seeing him for a few minutes from the window of the streetcar when he and Giulio have recognized each other. But, because he knew well Giulio and Lala, he knew so many things about our life that we felt at once like old friends.

I told him how Giulio came home from Katowice with the news that the Red Cross convoy train repatriating the Italian prisoners of war was departing to Prague the next morning; how he and Lala packed in a hurry their belongings. Rufin was genuinely happy that everything went smoothly with the-ir departure.

I asked Rufin, "Have you received any letters from Giulio and my daughter mailed from Prague?"

"No," he said, "we didn't receive any letters yet."

Hearing from him this answer I expressed my worry, "Something did go wrong in Prague. It is already eighteen days that they left. They promised to write from Prague on your address and in your name."

Rufin reassured me, "With the marriage certificate<sup>4</sup> they had, they should not have any problem in the Italian consulate. I believe that the mail between the European countries is not going regularly yet."

As about me, Rufin said, "There is no problem for you to stay in my home, but I need a few days to arrange everything before I come and take you with your luggage."

He asked the young woman, "Is it possible for *Pani* Antonina to stay in your apartment for a few more days?"

She answered without hesitation, "She can stay with me as long as she may need it."

I stayed with her for three more days until Rufin had the time to arrange my move to his home.

On October 21, Rufin came to take me to Michalkowice,<sup>5</sup> where he lived. He said, "We will take today only a part of your luggage. The rest of it I will take a little at the time if the young woman does not object."

"You may leave it here," said my hostess, "it does not bother me."

"Thank you," said Rufin and explained, "I don't want that my neighbors would become suspicious about *Pani* Antonina moving in my house."

I paid generously with the Polish Zloty the young woman for her hospitality and left some sugar for her baby.

It was not completely dark yet when we arrived in Rufin's little town. We didn't go directly to his home, but he brought me to the house of his wife's parents. There were lots of people for the occasion of somebody's birthday. They put me on the covered porch where I stayed until everybody was gone. Then, under the cover of the night, he and his wife Lidia took me to their apartment. His wife, Lidia, prepared for me a small room off the kitchen. There were a few pieces of simple furniture, a bed for me to sleep, and a small chest of drawers.

During the supper Rufin said, "Michalkowice is a very small town and it would be impossible to conceal for long time that you are staying with us. But, to prevent suspicion of our neighbors that you are Soviet citizen, we should agree on a few rules that we all could follow. Since *Pani* speaks French well, the best thing is to tell to the curious that you are French and are waiting until you could return home."

We also agreed that another practical thing was to make me as little as possible noticeable by the people outside the home. I told him, "Since I had to earn my upkeep by jobbing on the market in Katowice, I will spend there long hours. Therefore, I would go out very early with the first streetcar and would return home when it would be almost dark."

On October 22, the next day after my arrival in Rufin and Lidia's home, I received two postcards mailed from Prague by Lala and Giulio. It was a short but important message in French: "Everything is fine as we expected. Prague is beautiful. We will write to you when we arrive in Turin. Love, Olga, Giulio."

All three of us, Rufin, Lidia, and I rejoiced from the good news. Rufin especially was happy that the marriage certificate that he got for Giulio and Lala served its purpose. A telegram arrived much later, on November 1, because it went first to Krakow, where there is another town called Michalkowice.

On October 28, at the end of the first week after my arrival in Michalkowice, I wrote a long letter<sup>6</sup> to my daughter and Giulio describing them the last two-and-half weeks after their departure. I mentioned my scary encounter with the NKVD agents using the name "our cousins," how they arrested, interrogated, and released me; and how I quickly departed from Laband to Zabrze.

From the first week staying with Rufin and Lidia I was getting up early and going to the market in Katowice where I continued doing business of buying, reselling, and

bartering, as I did before to provide for Lala, Giulio, and me. Only there was no Giulio to help me carry the heavy items and helping me on the market.

I was returning home late in the afternoon bringing food that Lidia asked me to barter, or to buy, for feeding all three of us. Therefore, I felt that I was providing now for my new family. Lidia was a good cook and we ate well. She was also a very pleasant, sincere, and good-natured young woman who made me feel right away as a member of the family.

Rufin was a very practical man and he appreciated my contribution in providing food, which they could not afford to buy on his salary. He treated me with respect and was genuinely concerned to keep his word that he gave to Giulio and Lala to take good care of me.

I told him that Polish police began to check the identification cards and sometimes even surrounded the market to catch German women who were not allowed selling on the market. It was also not very safe for me to be caught as a Soviet citizen. Therefore, Rufin, who worked in the Town Hall of Zabrze, immediately made for me the Polish identification card. While presenting me the card, he complimented me, "You speak Polish already so well that no one would take you for a foreigner."

By that time I really knew Polish reasonably well, especially the market jargon. But I had an accent, about which somebody on the market asked me if I was from the town of Krakow. I answered that I lived there before. After that I used this as my cover for not speaking with the local accent.

Rufin and Lidia lived in a house that had several apartments. In the apartment next door lived a mother and a daughter who worked somewhere in the government offices. Although Rufin and Lidia presented me to them and to a few other acquaintances as a French woman, they suggested, "*Pani*, once in a while buy on the market some good coffee and give it as a present to these neighbors to keep them friendly and to prevent them from reporting to the Polish authorities, in case they should become suspicious of your identity."

I did what they suggested. I was also buying a good coffee and some other products for Lidia's sister without any profit for myself. She had a little grocery shop on the street front of her parents' house, which was on the same street where Rufin and Lidia lived. She was reselling these products making a small profit.

Pietrowski family was small: Lidia's parents, Lidia, her sister, and brother who had a wife and two little girls. They all lived in Michalkowice not far from each other. They had very close and truly affectionate relationship. All of them were very good to me right from the beginning and made me feel as a part of their happy family. I was invited in their homes on all holidays and family celebrations, as well as on many Sundays by the Mother for the afternoon tea.

Lidia's mother liked to hear the story about how my family was able to escape from the Soviet Union. During one of my first visits, the Mother told me, "I have also a very interesting story to tell you about our family. After the revolution in Russia we gave asylum to a middle-aged White Army officer. He miraculously was able to reach the Polish border during the civil war, when the Reds defeated his unit and he was able to escape from being shot. His family remained in Russia, but he never wrote to them fearing to cause them harm from the reprisals by the infamous at that time GPU. He was a very fine and educated man. He lived with us for many years until he died in our

home. After his death we wrote to his family in Russia offering to send them his belongings. The family thanked us for taking care of their loved one, but didn't want anything to be sent to them."

She reflected for a while and added, "Isn't it a very strange coincidence that after many years my daughter is giving a refuge to a Russian woman who also escaped from the Bolsheviks and does not want to be deported to the concentration camp in the Soviet Union?" She shook her head, like she couldn't figure it out and wondered, "It looks like our family was destined to give asylum to the Russians who escape from the Bolsheviks."

"Maybe it was not a coincidence," I responded and explained, "My maternal grandfather and grandmother emigrated in the late 1800's from the city of Warsaw to eastern part of Ukraine. They were Polish by the name Grudzinsky.<sup>7</sup> You see, maybe it was a destiny that I had to find a refuge in the land of my ancestors and to find help from their compatriots." This revelation made a big impression on the whole Pietrowski family and I felt that they accepted this, as if it was a fate that led me to their daughter and son-in-law to seek the refuge.

Rufin's parents lived in the small house inside the same courtyard where their son lived. I didn't have a chance to know them too well, because they were already very frail when I arrived. They stayed in their apartment and didn't go out or participate in the Pietrowski family gatherings. I think that Lidia was helping them during the day when I was on the market. I saw them probably once or twice during the whole time I lived with Rufin and Lidia. Rufin had two younger brothers who didn't visit him often or probably when I was not at home, so, I didn't know them too well either.

During the long evenings after supper Lidia, Rufin, and I sat in the kitchen and talked. They liked to listen about the strange events that my family lived through and were amazed at the many circumstances and people that helped us to overcome all the odds that were against us.

When Lidia and Rufin were talking about their life, their joys and concerns, it was unavoidable for them to share with me their disappointment of not having children. Lidia told me that every Sunday in church she was lighting a candle to the Virgin Mary and every year she and Rufin went on pilgrimage to pray the Virgin Mary of Czestochova<sup>8</sup> to ask for her blessings and to beg her for a miracle to have a child. She told me, "In the spring we will be going to Czestochova. You shall come with us to pray for your loved ones."

Although Rufin was a devoted Catholic and prayed for a miracle, I found out that he was also attempting to find a more practical way to make a baby for himself. One day I had a very successful day on the market and decided to go to Zabrze to visit the young woman who gave me hospitality when I escaped from Laband. I wanted to take some food for her little boy.

She was sincerely happy to see me and very grateful for the food I brought for her child. Then somewhat hesitantly she shared with me her concern that Rufin was visiting her very often after work.

"*Pani!*", she asked me, "tell me what I should do? *Pan* Rufin told me that he is married for ten years to a wonderful woman whom he loves very much, but that his wife is not able to have children. He began first by imploring me, and lately by insisting, that he and I make for him a baby, which he will take home right after birth. He is promising

me that he would take good care of me and of my boy during and after my pregnancy. I told him that I am waiting for my husband to return home soon from Germany. But *Pan* Rufin is scaring me that it is unlikely that the German men would be allowed to come back to Poland."

I answered to the young woman, "It is true that *Pan* Rufin and his wife have a great desire to have a baby. Also, *Pan* Rufin is probably right that you have to wait very long time to be reunited with your husband."

Then I reflected for a while and added, "I couldn't give you any advice on what you should do with *Pan* Rufin's proposal of making with him a baby. It is especially not right for me, because *Pan* Rufin and his wife are very good to me by allowing me to live in their home. I think that on this matter you should make your own decision. It is too personal and too sensitive for anybody to give you an advice on what to do, or how to handle this delicate situation."

The young woman agreed with me and asked me not to mention our conversation to Rufin and his wife. Later I found out that Rufin was unsuccessful in convincing her to make for him a baby.

After receiving the postcards and a telegram from Lala and Giulio, which they mailed from Prague, I didn't receive from them any letters for a very long time. I was very worried about the health of my daughter and the baby who was due in the middle of November.

Rufin was consoling me, "It is impossible that your daughter and Giulio are not writing to you. I am sure that the problem is with the international mail that is not normalized yet." After agreeing with him, I continued to worry anyway.

When I was complaining about not knowing anything about my husband, or was worrying what would happen to me, Lidia in her calm and sweet voice would tell me, "If the Providence guided your family all this time from seemingly insolvable situations by showing you the right road to follow, why should it abandon you now? Have faith and patience to wait when the new road opens for you."

To this Rufin would add, "We believe that your family was destined to overcome all the obstacles on your way to freedom. It has to be a happy ending to your story, it cannot happen otherwise!"

After such convincing arguments I almost believed that they were right and that I should be more patient and give time to the situation in Europe to become stable after the chaos created by the war.

Every day when I was returning home from the market my first question to Lidia was, "Are there any letters for me?" Lidia would look at me with the sorrowful eyes and shake her head and Rufin would try to convince me that international mail from Italy was not working yet.

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letters to her daughter Olga, Michalkowice, Poland, October 1945, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapter "The Gold Coin."

3. A small town in southwestern Poland near the town of Katowice [in Polish], Katowitz [in German].

4. See the chapter "Three Thousand Zloty Solution."

5. A small town in southwestern Poland near the town of Katowice [in Polish].

6. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, a letter to her daughter Olga, Michalkowice, Poland, October 28,

1945. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
7. See the chapter "Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy."
  8. Famous Sanctuary in Poland.

## **Part Fourteen**

### **Safe In Italy At Last**



# Meeting Giulio's Mother

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

On Saturday, October 13, 1945, late in the evening when it was already dark, we arrived at the Porta Nuova Station in Turin<sup>1</sup>. From there we took the streetcar; Giulio showed his "*Reduce*" document<sup>2</sup> to the conductor and he allowed us to ride without tickets. The streetcar was packed with passengers. Giulio, who was carrying his military backpack and two suitcases, slowly made his way toward the rear exit door by patiently asking each standing passenger, "*Permesso, permesso.*"<sup>3</sup> Holding tight at the corner of his coat I closely followed him, squeezing myself quickly into the space he made moving sideways with the luggage.

As the passengers moved forward toward the exit, Giulio reached the streetcar's rear landing and placed the suitcases on the floor, leaving for me space between them and the window, where I was protected from hastily exiting passengers. We stood there all the way until we reached a streetcar stop on a corner of Corso Novara and Corso Palermo.

"We are home!" exclaimed Giulio joyfully and got out first with the luggage and then helped me out. He placed the suitcases on the sidewalk and after deep sigh of relief gave me a long tender kiss. "My dearest Lala, we are finally home!" He said, "This big building on the corner is *Corso Novara, venty-cinque.*"<sup>4</sup>

As we entered the main entrance door of the five story apartment house, Giulio asked me, "Do you mind to wait for me here? I think it will be better if I go first by myself to see what the situation is in my home and to prepare them that I am not alone, that my wife is with me."

"If you think that this is the best to do," I replied, "I don't mind to wait."

He gave me a quick kiss on the cheek and left with the entire luggage, except my bag and pocketbook. I heard his footsteps resound higher and higher on the staircase and finally stop.

I found myself standing near the double door main entrance in a long barely lighted hall leading to the staircase. At once I was overwhelmed by the strong pungent odor of urine emanating from a wet floor on the opposite side of the door. I opened my side of the door and held it open with my back. This allowed me to breathe fresh air. I was afraid to get out and stand alone on the barely lighted sidewalk and decided to remain protected by the shadow in the middle of the threshold. A woman came to the door and I stepped inside to let her through. She looked at me, as if trying to recognize who I was, and without saying anything walked toward the end of the hall and disappeared on the staircase.

When my eyes got used to the dim light, I walked to the other end of the entrance hall where I could see an open-ing toward a courtyard. I thought, "Maybe there I can breathe better." I walked slowly, keeping myself close to the wall. Under my feet I felt gritty concrete floor and here and there I stepped on the pieces of paper, empty

cigarette packages and butts. When I reached the end of the hall, I found myself on the inner corner of the L-shaped building with a dark rectangular courtyard and a wide staircase on the right. Looking up I saw on both sides of the building faint glimmers of light peeking through the narrow windows. The shadows of the continuous railings of long balconies on each floor were running parallel to each other and connected in the corner at the staircase. A small patch of the dark sky with a few pale stars was visible above the roofs of the neighboring multistory buildings enclosing the courtyard.

It seemed to me that I was waiting for a long time and I began to worry that something had happened in Giulio's family. Then I heard the sound of footsteps, starting up high and rapidly coming down the staircase. Giulio came running toward me. "I did as quickly as I could," he said. "My mother is alone in the apartment. This makes it easier to introduce you. I told her that you don't speak Italian and that you and I speak French. You just tell her '*Buona sera*,<sup>5</sup> *Mamma!* Anything else I would translate for you."

Giulio took in one hand my bag and with the other took me under my arm saying, "I will help you to climb these four flights of stairs. They are rather steep and you are carrying our baby, too."

When we finally reached the fifth story landing, I was out of breath and told him, "Let me catch my breath before we go inside the apartment. Was your mother surprised when you told her about me?"

"I think that she was so surprised and happy to see me that anything else I told her didn't make much effect on her."

We walked almost to the end of the right side balcony passing two doors, and then Giulio opened the third door and let me in. The electric light shining from the bare light bulb dazzled me and I squinted my eyes for a few seconds. Giulio led me toward his mother who was putting a pot of coffee on the metal woodstove and said, "Lala, this is my mother. Mamma this is my wife, Lala."

"*Buona sera*, Mamma!" I said in Italian.

"*Buona sera*," she answered.

And we cautiously embraced each other.

Giulio told me to remove my coat and used that moment to tell his mother, "Mamma, as you can see, in about one month we are expecting our baby to be born."

This time I saw a surprise on his mother's face and she embraced him, telling something in Italian. Then she came toward me and this time embraced me with more sincerity.

Giulio invited me to sit down at the table and told his mother, "Lala is very tired. We had a long trip. In the streetcar we stood on our feet all the way from Porta Nuova Station. After we drink some coffee, she should go to sleep right away." Then he asked her, "Where we will be sleeping, here on the couch?" She did not answer right away. "Well, what is the matter?" Giulio prompted.

"Domenico sleeps on the couch," she said. Then with the sorrowful expressions on her face added, "He doesn't live any more with his wife."

"Oh," Giulio said, surprised with this news, "it complicates the situation."

"For tonight you shall sleep with your brother on the couch as you used to sleep before," she replied; then pointing at me added, "And she could sleep in the bedroom on my side of our bed and I would sleep in the middle. Tomorrow we shall think how to solve this situation."

Giulio explained me the problem, "Tonight you will sleep with my mother and father in their bed. You should not worry," he reassured me, "it is a big bed like the one the four of us slept in at Rufin's home.<sup>6</sup> It is only for tonight; tomorrow we shall find a better solution to our sleeping accommodations."

His mother excused herself, saying that they had already eaten their supper and there was nothing left for us to eat, except some bread. She served us a cup of hot chicory coffee and said, "I am sorry, but we don't have any sugar in the house. I will give you the bread."

Giulio stopped her by saying, "Mamma, we have bread given to us by the Americans in Munich for the trip." He took from my bag the remaining dark bread and we ate a slice with the coffee.

His mother tasted a piece of our bread. "Besides that it is dark," she commented, "it isn't baked well, it's raw inside."

Giulio laughed, "You should have tasted the kind of bread they were giving us in the German prisoners of war camp!"

Hearing the word "camp," his mother said, "By the way, a couple of weeks ago we received a letter from your friend Bruno Zanobini. He wrote us that he recently returned from Germany and notified us that you were in good health and that you remained there with one Russian family. We were guessing that there was probably some very good reason for you to stay there."

"Now you know the reason," said Giulio touching gently my hand. Then he told me that Bruno returned home only recently and translated the substance of his letter. We understood that, wherever he was in Germany, the repatriation didn't start there much earlier than in Poland. We were happy that he was home.

After we finished drinking coffee Giulio told me that before I left to sleep he would accompany me to a latrine, which was next-door, outside on the balcony. The latrine was a cubicle with concrete walls and floor and had a simple hole in a step elevation from the floor, but high under the ceiling was a water tank that could be flushed by pulling a metal chain. Giulio waited for me on the balcony. When I returned to the kitchen I washed my hands and rinsed my face under a faucet of a gray stone sink located in the corner on the left side of the door.

Meanwhile, his mother prepared a bed in a bedroom. It was a huge king-size bed that occupied more than half of the room. Giulio placed our luggage between the door and the chair standing in the corner close to the bed. He told me to lie down at that edge of the bed. In giving me a good night kiss he reassured me again not to worry. I was so tired that as soon as he closed the door I fell asleep almost immediately and slept until the next morning without hearing anything that was going on in that small apartment.

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1. See the chapter "Repatriation of the Italian Prisoners of War."

2. "Ex-serviceman."

3. "Allow me, allow me" [in Italian].

4. Twenty-five, Novara Avenue, [in Italian].

5. "Good evening" [in Italian].

6. See the chapter "The Three Thousand Zloty Solution."

# The First Day Events

By Olga Gladky Verro  
Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

The next morning after our arrival in Turin Giulio woke me up with his tender good morning kiss, "*Dormigliona*,"<sup>1</sup> he greeted me, "you slept all night. It's time to get up. It's Sunday and everybody is up for a long time. Dress-up here, because Domenico and Mamma are in the kitchen where you can wash your face at the kitchen sink. Babbo had already gone to work."

"Br-r-r," I exclaimed shivering as I sat on the edge of the bed. "It feels cold coming out from under the warm quilt."

"Well," replied Giulio, "during the night they don't leave the stove on. Mamma told me that it is hard to find wood and it is very expensive." Leaving the room he suggested, "When you come in the kitchen say only '*Ciao*'<sup>2</sup> to them."

I quickly put on my dress and sweater, combed my hair and cautiously opened the door. They all were sitting at the table sipping hot chicory coffee. Giulio hurried to my side saying, "Come in, come in, Lala."

"*Ciao*," I greeted timidly looking first at Giulio's mother and then at his brother. They greeted me too.

Giulio introduced his brother to me in French, "This is my brother, Domenico." And, in Italian, "This is my wife, Lala." Domenico got up, ceremoniously kissed my hand, saying something in Italian. I understood it was a pleasantry.

I said, "*Ciao*, Domenico."

Mother asked me something and Giulio translated it to me, "Did you sleep well?"

"*Sì, grazie*,"<sup>3</sup> I answered in Italian.

Domenico laughed and said, "She speaks already Italian."

"She learns fast," Giulio replied. "In no time she will be speaking very well."

I felt awkward not knowing what to do next. Giulio understood and accompanied me outside to the balcony, and waited until I came out of the latrine. Back in the kitchen, to make it easier for me, Giulio told me, "Now wash your hands and face. Here is the clean towel."

He engaged his brother and mother in conversation, making me less conscious of them observing while I was washing myself. When I finished at the sink, Giulio got up, filled a cup and said, "Come and sit at the table to drink some hot coffee."

Domenico said something and Giulio translated it to me, "Wait until I tell my comrade partisans that my sister-in-law is a communist!"

"Go slowly bragging about her," Giulio warned him. "She is Russian,"<sup>4</sup> but not a communist."

"No-o?" wondered Domenico. "I thought that in Russia,"<sup>5</sup> everybody was communist."

"Well," replied Giulio, "when she learns to speak Italian she will explain to you that this is absolutely not true."

The Mother got up and went to the bedroom. Right away Giulio told me, "Lala, go and help Mamma to make bed." And I followed her.

Mamma had already opened the only window and the cold morning air rushed into the room. Mamma pulled down the blankets. I helped her on the other side of the bed and repeated all her moves in fluffing pillows, straightening mattress and pulling tight the bed sheets. Then with her hand she showed she wanted me to follow her in the kitchen, leaving bed undone to freshen up in the cold air.

When we came back to the kitchen, Giulio had just finished writing something on a piece of paper. Then he took from his back-pack the envelope which I knew very well; it was his fiancée's letter in which she wrote that her parents objected to her marriage with him and where she concluded that they might get married only if it will be "the God's will."<sup>6</sup> He inserted his note and some photographs in her envelope.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

He answered me in French and then repeated it in Italian for his mother, "I just wrote to my fiancée: 'It was not the God's will for us to marry. I got married to another girl and am expecting soon to be a father. Please, return all my letters and photographs; also the picture of Madonna that my uncle Pietro gave us as a wedding present.'" Then he added, "I am sending Domenico to bring this note to Elsa. This should be sufficient to put an end to any possible arguments and recriminations."

His mother quickly added, "You forgot to ask her to return the engagement ring."

"No," Giulio answered. "She should keep it. I broke the promise, not she."

The Mother got upset and raising her voice insisted, "It is an expensive ring and you need now the money!"

Very calmly, but firmly Giulio repeated, "No, I said 'No', Mamma, and it's the end of the discussion."

But the Mother was going on and on, trying to convince Giulio that the engagement ring was expensive; her final argument was, "After all the trouble that Elsa's family made for you and for us, she does not deserve to keep it." She was so preoccupied with her argument that she didn't even see that Domenico put on his warm jacket and left to deliver the message.

To calm her down, Giulio embraced her, and kissing her on the cheek said very calmly, "Mamma, it is my first day at home, let's not quarrel. I have done as my conscience told me to do it right. Besides, Domenico is already gone."

"If she is as proud as she was making us to believe," replied his mother, "she herself should return you the ring."

"Well, if she returns it," replied Giulio, "I certainly would not bring it back to her. But knowing how close-fisted her parents are, I do not expect it to happen."

As his mother calmed down she remarked, "I could imagine their faces when Domenico brings them the news." And she grinned anticipating their reaction. "Those bigots had the impudence to say that they could not allow their daughter to marry you! I am glad that you paid them in kind and showed them that you didn't need their precious daughter after all!"

"Mamma, Mamma," interrupted her Giulio, "I did not do it for revenge to Elsa or her family! They have nothing to do with me marrying Lala. Remember that I was a long time away from home. I was lonely and met Lala. We fell in love with each other. We shared the good and the bad events and many, many times were close to losing each other. This bonded us even closer."

His mother was surprised that her son didn't have bitter feelings toward his

fiancée and her family for having rejected him. "You know Giulio, after the quarrel with her family we kept some contact with her," she explained, "because we didn't know what the two of you would decide when you returned home. She even had sent you a package to Germany. So, I guessed that maybe she still had some hope that her parents would change their minds about you."

Giulio tried to stop her, "All right, all right, Mamma, it's all over. There is no need to talk about it any more." He embraced her again and gave her a kiss on the cheek. This finally calmed her down and she stopped. Giulio kissed her again and then kissed me and said, "Here are the two women who are dear to me."

All that time I was quietly observing their emotional discussion in Italian, which I could not understand, but from some words I figured out that it was connected to Giulio's fiancée and to me. Now that their discussion seemed ended, I asked Giulio, "What it was all about?"

"Please Lala, not now," he replied, "I will tell you later when we are alone."

Giulio went to the bedroom and brought my bag and one of our suitcases into the kitchen. "Let's give Mamma the gifts we brought for her," he told me. "Give her first the silver pin that we bought in Prague."

His mother watched us with curiosity. I searched in my bag and, when I pulled out a small package, she came closer. I extended my hand and gave it to her. Giulio said, "Mamma, this is Lala's gift for you, we bought it in Czechoslovakia."<sup>7</sup>

She carefully opened the tissue paper and admired the pin. "*Grazie*," she thanked me and pinned it on her dark sweater. The shiny metal brightened up her somber outfit.

"It looks good on you," said Giulio. "Go and look in the mirror."

She went to the bedroom and, when she returned, commented seemingly satisfied with the pin, "It is big, but not flashy. Thank you, Lala." She patted me on the shoulder, but didn't kiss me. Much later I found out that giving a pin as a gift was a bad omen by the folk's beliefs and she was not happy about it.

Meanwhile Giulio placed on the table the suitcase where we had all the fabrics that he and my mother purchased during the summer on the market in Katowice. He opened it and said to me, "Let's show Mamma what we brought with us and give her some fabrics as a gift."

Seeing the suitcase with the fabrics, excitement appeared in her eyes. Giulio took the initiative to remove fabrics from the suitcase and explained one by one how he and my mother bought them on the market in Poland. There were several cuts of materials with bright colorful designs and Giulio said, "These are for Lala." And looking at his mother's dark outfit commented, "They are too bright for you, Mamma. Maybe this one with subdued colors would be good for your blouse." He looked at me and asked, "What do you think, Lala?" I nodded approving his choice. He gave it to her.

Then he lifted a cut of blue-gray silk with a novelty weave of crinkled surface forming a design. "What do you think Lala?" he asked me again. "Will it be enough for the Mamma's blouse?"

"I think so," I guessed. "Ask your mother if she likes it."

I was hoping that she didn't, because I liked it very much and was planning to sew it for myself.

She took it and feeling its softness touched it to her cheek. Holding smooth and delicate silk next to her skin, pleasure showed on her face. Placing it against her chest

she asked Giulio, "Is this color becoming to me?"

"Yes, very much, he complemented her and explained, "This is a real fine silk made in France. Lala's mother and I bought it on the market from a French woman."

His mother carefully folded the fabric and putting it on the table next to her said to him, "*Grazie*."

When Giulio pulled out a large cut of white cotton pinwale piqué his mother exclaimed, "Ah-h! This fabric will be good for my blouse!"

"There is plenty of fabric here for both of you," said Giulio. Then he asked me in French, "Don't you think so?"

I agreed but added, "Don't forget that we brought this fabric from my home and I want to sew from it clothes for our baby." Giulio translated it to his mother.

"Yes, yes, white will be good for the baby," she agreed, somewhat embarrassed that she thought only about herself.

At the bottom of the suitcase was also a fabric that my mother and I brought all the way from home. It was the navy pure wool Cheviot fabric that my mother bought for my father's suit. I knew from Giulio that his mother was a good connoisseur of wool fabrics, because she selected them for all his suits and a coat when he returned with some money earned as a Legionnaire<sup>8</sup> during the Spanish war. Indeed, as soon as she saw this fabric she grabbed it and held it in her hands, admiring it; then she announced in a tone of voice like she was the one that had the right to make a decision about what to do with it, "Oh, Giulio, this is a beautiful fabric! It is probably enough for a new suit for you!"

"No, Mamma," he interrupted her enthusiasm, "this fabric Lala's mother gave to us recommending that we make for her a good suit that she needs. I have plenty of new suits that we made for me after I returned from Spain. I am so skinny that they definitely would fit me now."

"It is a pity to waste such good material for the woman's suit," she replied, "It will go out of fashion quickly."

"Not if it will be made by a tailor," contradicted her Giulio. "Tailored suits are classic style, they never get out of fashion."

The expression on his mother's face clearly showed that she didn't approve of Giulio's reasoning, or maybe she didn't like to be deprived of making a decision in the matters she was used to until now. At that moment entered Domenico and we abruptly ended our viewing of fabrics.

Domenico announced, "Brother, the mission is accomplished." And he placed on the table the package with the returned photographs, letters, and a roll with Madonna's picture.

With a sneer on her lips, his mother, immediately asked him, "Well, how did they take the news?" The expression on her face showed expectation to hear a description of a dramatic scene that Domenico participated in a short while ago.

But he calmly said, "Well, when I arrived there, they were all dressed up and standing in the room ready to go to church. Of course, they were very surprised to see me, and especially at such unusual time for a social visit."

Then Domenico recounted the scene, "Elsa asked right away, 'Had something bad happened? There is bad news about Giulio?'"

"And I replied, 'No, he is all right, he arrived only yesterday evening from Germany."

Here is his message for you.' And I gave her Giulio's letter without saying anything else.

"Standing next to her sister, Rita, Elsa quickly opened the envelope and read the note. Without saying a word to her parents, she put one arm around her sister and they went to another room. Her parents remained standing and didn't invite me to sit down. The Mother asked me, 'What happened to Giulio? Why he himself didn't come?'

"I told her, 'Giulio only sent a message to Elsa and she herself shall explain it to you.'

"The Mother tried several times to engage me in talking about it, but I told her politely, 'I am sorry, Signora, but my brother didn't give me any message for you.'

"Then she asked me, 'How is your mother?'

"Very well, thank you,' I answered.

"An uneasy tension took over and she attempted to go to see her daughter, but her husband stopped her, 'If she needs you, she will call you.'

"After a while Rita returned with several packets and gave them to me, but Elsa didn't return back. I thanked Rita, said 'good-bye' to all and left. That's the end of the story."

Giulio's mother looked very disappointed; she expected to hear how Elsa and especially her parents reacted to the unpleasant news. Giulio thanked Domenico and then explained briefly to me in French what happened.

I began folding and placing back in the suitcase the fabrics, except those that we gave to his mother, and Giulio joined helping me. When Giulio went to the bedroom to put back the suitcase I followed him. I knew that at that moment he needed a loving hug to alleviate a burden that he had on his conscience.

Notwithstanding that the rejection came two-and-half years ago from his fiancée's side, he still felt that he done wrong to her. For a while we stayed embraced, hugging silently and allowing our bodies to restore the inner equilibrium in our souls by a flow of tender reassurance that we were there for each other. Then Giulio gently placed his palms on my cheeks, kissed me tenderly and said, "Now it's all behind me and that chapter of my life finally is closed. Ahead of us is our whole life together."

He paused for a while and added, "We have a lot to do starting this afternoon when we shall go to our Parish to make a date for our church wedding. We need to be officially married to have all the benefits that the society offers only to those who follow its laws, rules, and traditions. It is not enough any more for us to be bound only by our commitment to each other as a husband and wife. The birth of our child requires us to register officially our union."

"Yes, *Giulyen'ka*,"<sup>9</sup> I agreed.

Before we went back to the kitchen, Giulio warned me, "By the way, Lala, you should know that, as I explained you before, I didn't tell my parents that we are not officially married, I just told them that we were not married in the church and that we need to do it soon, because it will take long time before the regular international postal service is established and we could request our official documents from Poland."

I was surprised that he didn't change his mind and didn't tell the truth to his parents, but I decided to talk about it at some other time.

"Now, let's go to the kitchen," he said, "I need to ask Mamma and Domenico about some details for the things I have to do on Monday."

I replied, "Yes, you will be very busy next week."

In the kitchen his mother had already begun to cook tomato sauce. Her advice to Giulio for tomorrow was strictly practical, "The first thing on Monday morning you should go to the City Hall and register both of you for food coupons, otherwise we cannot even buy the bread for you."

"First I should go to get discharged from the military service," Giulio said. "From there I shall go to the City Hall to register us for the residency. I will need my military discharge when I will go there and to the STIPEL<sup>10</sup> Office." Then he asked his brother half-jokingly, "They didn't change yet the old Fascist law that orders companies to give servicemen returning from the war their previous jobs?"

"No," answered Domenico, "until the elections of the new government all the previous laws remain in force."

"Then," concluded Giulio, "I shall present myself to the STIPEL administration and ask when I can resume my work."

"Talking about the fascists," Mamma changed the subject, and said to Domenico, "Tell your brother how they arrested you."

And Domenico began to tell Giulio his adventures as a partisan.<sup>11</sup> I could not understand it at that time, but later Giulio translated to me his brother's story<sup>12</sup> as he recounted it:

"Our partisan brigade was working in the city and our task was to transport weapons and ammunition from where they were stored in the city to the designated places where the other partisans would pick them up and deliver to the fighting units. For a while the system worked well because all men and women in each group did not go far from the usual places where they lived and worked, thus not arousing easily suspicions of the people and of the Fascist agents. But, when one member of our group got caught carrying the weapons in the streetcar, during the interrogation he revealed the names of those he knew from our group. Unfortunately, my name was among those he gave to the Fascist agents.

"This happened when I quarreled with my wife, Bianca, and I was living here with my parents. Sometimes here in the apartment I kept overnight some weapons that had to be delivered next day. It was a lucky coincidence that I didn't have any weapons the night when two Fascist agents came here and searched the apartment. However, they arrested me anyway and brought me to the *Le Nove*<sup>13</sup> where they kept me in prison as I waited to be investigated. There were many political prisoners at that time and the prison was crowded. It was scary when the prison guards were taking people one by one for interrogation and bringing them back badly beaten and covered with blood. And those were the lucky ones, because some were not returning back at all, they either died from the torture or were shot."

"I was visiting him every day," Mother interrupted him impatiently; she wanted to tell her part of the story. "I was bringing him something to eat, taking it from our rations, because they were scarcely feeding them in prison. It was a tiring trip to get there and it took me more than half-a-day. Do you know how far it is from here?" she asked Giulio, who nodded his head. "I had to take two streetcars to get there."

Domenico commented bitterly, "But my wife was afraid and she never came to visit me in prison."

"Well," his mother said ironically, "in compensation, your partisan girlfriend came to visit you very often." And then, as if she expected him to deny it, she quickly added, "I

saw her there several times. Don't tell me that she didn't know that you were married and had a baby daughter."

"Mamma!" Domenico stopped her sternly. "Don't start again your innuendo that she is a bad girl. Remember that she was putting herself in a real danger by visiting me in prison, because she was a member of our partisan group."

"Nevertheless," his mother tried to continue her argument, "she knew it and..."

"Mamma, *basta!*"<sup>14</sup> Domenico interrupted her briskly; knowing that his mother does not give up easily, he didn't allow her to go on. "Let me finish telling Giulio how I got out of prison."

Reluctantly she allowed Domenico to continue his story.

"I was lucky that Uncle Pietro<sup>15</sup> who, as you know, was a custodian for many years in the Fascist Club of Professionals, was very respected by all its members. He knew several well-known Turin lawyers who were the members of the Club. He pleaded with them to help him get his young nephew out of prison. One of them had a clout in the higher Fascist circles and promised him to do something about me as long as what the Uncle told him was true, that there were no weapons found during the search of the apartment when I was arrested."

"I told Domenico," inserted his mother, "that Uncle Pietro, God rest his soul, was trying to find the way to get him out, but your brother didn't believe that he could help him."

"But, I was wrong," conceded Domenico. "In a few weeks, one early after-noon, which was an unusual time for the interrogations, the prison guard came and called only my name; I went with him expecting the worst. Instead, I saw my uncle Pietro waiting for me. They let me go in his custody and told him that he would be responsible for my whereabouts, and told me not to be involved with the partisan's activities. He accompanied me home and made me swear that I would keep out of trouble and would not go back with my old crowd, because, he said, nobody would help me the next time if I would be arrested. Anyway, the partisan group could not use my help any more, fearing that I would be under surveillance."

"Tell your brother," prompted his mother, "how lucky you were to be released at that time."

"Oh, yes," Domenico said somberly, "after I came home from *Le Nuove* the political events began to unfold very rapidly. The Fascists were desperate to hold to their power at any cost. At that time no one knew for sure what had happened to all the suspects that were remaining in the prison, they just disappeared and no one of them returned home. But later it became known that without further investigation they all were shot." And he concluded, "I could have been one of them."

"Yes," said Giulio, "these were difficult years everywhere. The whole world got crazy. The human life had no value any more. During the war there are no laws or justice. At any time whoever has the power of the gun has the absolute authority, they make their own rules and do whatever they want with those whom they dominate—the winners rule at will over the losers."

Domenico listened with respect to his older brother's thoughts and when Giulio finished, he asked him with admiration, "Where did you learn to express yourself so eloquently?"

Giulio smiled and gave him the modest answer, "I always listen to how the people

who are smarter than I talk, and I learn from them. I also read good books written by the best writers and learn from them too."

"You see," replied Domenico, "I could never give such good answer as you just did."

"Well, don't exaggerate," said Giulio, "you can say it in your own way, maybe better than I can. And you can do many things better than I. For example, you sing better than I ever could." And the brothers laughed and patted each other on the shoulders.

"Now tell me about Uncle Pietro," asked Giulio. "How did he die?"

"My poor brother, my poor brother," complained the Mother. He didn't deserve to die at the hands of the partisans. He never wronged or harmed anybody in his entire life."

"But he was in the wrong place at the wrong time," Domenico explained. "As you know, being a custodian of the Fascist Club of Professionals building, he lived there. When the partisans fought the fascists, they did the same to them what the fascists did to the partisans until the last days they were in power.

When the partisans came to the club to search for the fascists, Uncle opened the door and they grabbed him, probably convinced that, if he lived there, he was also a Fascist. At that moment everybody was filled with hatred and revenge for what the fascists did to their comrades," Domenico justified their action.

"We didn't know about it right away," his mother continued the story. "After a few days when he didn't show up here as usual, I went to the club and found my mother alone. She could not understand why they took her son away. Before this happened, she was already frail, could not walk well and her mind was becoming confused; she depended on Pietro to take care of her. After she was left alone in that big place, she became even more disoriented. All that she was able to tell me was that the men came, searched their apartment and the club, took her son away, and that he never came back."

After an emotional pause, the Mother continued, "I notified right away my brother Duilio<sup>16</sup> about what happened. So, I, and Verginia<sup>17</sup> with Giuliana<sup>18</sup> and Rita,<sup>19</sup> were taking turns to help my mother. We did what we could to find out what happened to Zio<sup>20</sup> Pietro. We went to the prison, the morgue, the cemetery, the hospitals, and the registry office asking if there were any records about my brother, but it was all in vain," she complained. "The answer was always the same, 'There are so many people who disappeared in these few weeks. Nobody kept records of who they were and what happened to them.'" Then she prompted Domenico, "Tell him, how you tried to find out something about your uncle from your comrades partisans."

"What there is to tell?" he said. "It was such confusion in the whole city. It seems that the partisan command was involved with much more important objectives at that time. In the chaos of the last days each partisan unit and even some small groups or individuals were acting independently in their reprisal against the Fascists. They didn't register their victims, they probably didn't even know their names."

"My poor brother," Mamma complained again. "He, who was so religious, more than any one else in our family, and he couldn't have a decent Christian burial."

Giulio got up, embraced his mother and said, "Uncle Pietro was a good person—he didn't deserve to die in such tragic way."

For a while all remained silent, immersed in somber thoughts. Then Giulio began to translate for me in French what Domenico and his mother had told him.

Domenico listened with admiration at how his brother was speaking fluently in

French. Once in a while he would smile and tell Giulio, "I know why you have learned to speak French so well. Even I can understand many words. They sound like Piedmontaise."<sup>21</sup>

"True," said Giulio, "but I had a lot of practice in two years talking with my French coworker in Germany."

Meanwhile, the Mother was cooking Sunday lunch. She was chopping garlic and parsley on the wooden board placed on the marble top kitchen table. And I was fascinated by how she was using a curved tool to do it. Giulio said, "That tool is called *la mezzaluna*, in Italian it means a half-moon; it is used for *trittare*, in Italian it means to chop."

Then he used this occasion to teach me some other words. He pointed to the things that were on the table, named them in Italian and then named them in French, "That's *l'aglio* - the garlic; that's *il perzemolo* - the parsley; that's *la salsiccia* - the sausage; those are *i pomodori* - the tomatoes; that's *il sale* - the salt; and that's *il pepe* - the pepper; and there's *il riso* - the rice. From all those ingredients Mamma would make *il sugo di pomodoro* - the tomato sauce, for *il risotto* (and this word he named in Russian) - *kasha* - the porridge made from rice, which she would cook in the tomato sauce. And when *il risotto* will be *cotto* - cooked, we shall *mangiare* - eat. When he finished this sing-song, everybody laughed.

But I took it seriously and pointing to each item repeated the names in Italian.

"Brava!" exclaimed Domenico, "she will learn to speak Italian soon."

"I know it," calmly confirmed Giulio and rewarded me by giving me a quick kiss on the cheek.

I looked at him with surprise and whispered in French, "Did you dare to kiss me in your mother's and brother's presence?"

"Shush," he whispered back. "It was on the spur of the moment to reward you for learning your lesson so well."

"Babbo will be soon home for lunch," said Mamma. And Giulio got up, put the tablecloth on the table and I got up and helped him to set the table. I observed that Domenico was not used to helping his mother, he was just sitting there and watching, as if it was natural for him to see his brother doing it.

Babbo, as they called their father, came home for lunch and Giulio presented me to him. I embraced him cautiously because he had a service bag across one of his shoulders, newspaper in one hand, and I was trying not to push from his head his streetcar uniform cap that he didn't remove either entering the room or when he was greeting me. Only when Babbo removed his cap did I see that he was bald on the front of his head, making him look as if he had a very wide forehead, which actually was rather narrow.

"Well, well, well," he said to Domenico with satisfaction on his face, "now we can brag with our comrades that we have a genuine communist in our home."

"Not so fast," replied Domenico. "She is not a communist."

"Why not?" asked Babbo with disbelief.

"Because not everybody in Russia is a communist," explained Giulio.

"Look here!" Babbo pushed the newspaper "Unità"<sup>22</sup> into my hands, pointing with his finger to the headline printed in bold letters. "Could you read this? Communists shall win the Italian elections."

I looked at him, shaking my head because I had no idea what he was trying to tell me about communists. But he understood that I was trying to tell him "No" about their victory and in a raised voice began to explain something that I still couldn't understand.

Giulio promptly calmed him down, "Babbo, I told you last night that Lala doesn't understand and doesn't speak Italian."

"Why then she was shaking her head?" he asked angrily.

"She was showing you that she doesn't understand what you were telling her," Giulio explained calmly.

The Mother changed the subject by inviting us to eat, "Let's sit down for lunch, *il risotto* is ready." Giulio and Domenico pushed the table closer to the couch because there were only four chairs and Giulio decided that he and I would sit there together. I noticed that Mamma was not happy that we sat on the couch, but at that moment she didn't comment.

She placed a pot with the *risotto* in the middle of the table. She served Babbo first and then divided fairly the rest of the hot rice among the four of us. "I am sorry," she said to Giulio, "we don't have Parmesan cheese to put on."

"Mamma, it tastes good without it," he complimented her cooking. "The Italian spices in the sausage give the taste to the sauce. I have not tasted sauce like this for very long time."

"Do you like it?" he asked me.

"*Buono, buono*,"<sup>23</sup> I said in Italian.

Domenico commented, "You are right, brother, she will speak Italian soon."

I was surprised to see that, although there was a scarcity of food, the bottle of red wine was on the table. Giulio poured for me some wine and diluted it with water, as did everybody else, except Babbo who had the full glass without water. Mamma placed two oranges on the table and said, "Giulio, you share one with your wife and I will share it with Domenico." Babbo, instead of eating the fruit, poured for himself another glass of Barbera wine.

As soon as we finished eating Giulio hurried up to help his mother to clear the table while his brother again didn't even try to get up. I wanted to help too, but Giulio said, "Too many helpers now. You may help Mamma to dry the dishes."

After lunch Babbo had to return to work and he checked the time on his big watch that he pulled out of his uniform vest pocket and said, "Ten more minutes and I shall go." Then he opened his newspaper and shared with Giulio and Domenico some political news. He was talking in an authoritative tone that did not allow for any different opinion to be expressed by his sons. He checked again the time and left saying only "*Ciao*" to all.

As soon as his father left, Domenico got up and said, "I am going out."

His mother warned him, "Come on time for supper; you know that your father likes that we eat on time."

"Mamma, it is Sunday!" replied Domenico in a very annoyed tone of voice. "Please eat without me. I don't know when I would return."

"It is the first day that your brother is at home," she reproached him, "and you don't even care to keep him company!"

He didn't answer her, but just said, "*Ciao*," and quickly disappeared behind the door.

"You see," she told Giulio, "as soon as he can, he runs to see 'that girl.' Your brother got involved with 'that girl' when she was with him in the partisan group and she visited him in prison."

"I know about her. You told me this yesterday," Giulio said patiently.

"Now they work together at Rabotti.<sup>24</sup> He is never home in the evenings, on Saturdays, and Sundays. 'That girl' bewitched him; if he will go on like this, he would never go back to his wife." She continued to complain to Giulio. "It is a shame, because they have such a beautiful daughter, Silvia. And he doesn't care about her either. On some Sundays I have to force him to go and bring her here."

In the beginning Giulio tolerated with a good grace the complaining of his mother and abstained from making any comments about his brother. Then his patience began to thin out and he replied, "Mamma, he is young, he wants to have some fun."

"To have some fun?!" screamed his mother with indignation. "Rubbish! It's by having fun he became a father and had to marry the sixteen-years-old girl! He is already old enough to take some responsibilities for his actions." And she continued her lamentation for a while. I could not understand the words but figured this out from the tone of her voice.

Finally, Giulio interrupted his mother by asking her, "Do you think that with your preaching and annoying him constantly you could change the situation?"

"But, if I don't talk to him about it," she insisted, "who will put him on the right road?"

"It is his wife who should do something about it, if she wants him back," Giulio responded.

Then Giulio looked at the watch and said, "Mamma, would you excuse us, we better go to the Parish to talk to the priest so we could accomplish something today."

"God gracious! It's already so late. I wanted to get your suit out before you leave," she said and excused herself, "This morning there was so much to do and I completely forgot about it."

"Don't worry, Mamma, I am so used to wearing my uniform that nothing will happen if I wear it one more day," he answered.

"Then you better hurry," she replied, "before the priest goes for lunch."

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1. "Sleepy-head" [in Italian].

2. "Hi!" [in Italian].

3. "Yes, thank you." [in Italian].

4. It was common to call all Soviet citizens as Russians.

5. It was common to call the Soviet Union as Russia.

6. See the chapter: "Chance, Destiny Or the Will of God."

7. See the chapter "Repatriation of the Italian Prisoners of War."

8. See the chapter "Volunteer in the Italian Air Force."

9. A Russianized diminutive for the name Giulio.

10. STIPEL - acronym for *Societa Telefonica Interregionale Piemonte e Lombardia*. [in Italian] - Interregional Telephone Company of Piedmont and Lombardy.

11. Against the fascists and the Germans.

12. As recounted by Domenico Verro, Giulio's younger brother.

13. *Le Nove Prigioni*, shortly called "*Le Nove*" [in Italian] The New Prison.

14. "Mama, that will do!" [in Italian].

15. "The Franchini's Family Tree," Foglio No. 3; Giulio's uncle, his mother's older brother.

16. Ibid, Foglio No. 3; Giulio's uncle, his mother's younger brother.

17. Ibid, Foglio No. 8. - The Wife of Giulio's uncle Duilio.
18. Ibid, Foglio No. 8; Giulio's cousin, the older daughter of Duilio and Verginia.
19. Ibid, Foglio No. 8; Giulio's cousin, the younger daughter of Duilio and Verginia.
20. Uncle [in Italian].
21. Piedmontaise dialect is a vernacular used by the natives of the Piedmont, a northwestern province in Italy. This dialect was influenced by the geographical proximity to France and its on-off French domination of the region through the centuries.
22. Official Italian Communist Party newspaper.
23. "Good, good" [in Italian].
24. Factory in Turin, which produced some parts and rewired electrical motors.

## Strict Rules Of the Catholic Church

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

The Parish was just a few blocks away from Giulio's parents house, but to get there quicker Giulio took a shortcut through the narrow Via Favria behind their apartment building. When Giulio said its name, I said, "It looks exactly as you described it to me when you recounted about your childhood.<sup>1</sup> That's where your mother allowed you to play as a boy?"

"Yes," Giulio confirmed. "And in so many years it didn't change at all."

When we turned into another small street to the left, Giulio pointed to the plain one-story building, "That's the public washhouse operated by the city. There, for a little money one can wash clothes in huge washtubs with hot and cold water. When my mother has very big items to wash, she comes here. But the regular wash she does at home because it is too heavy to haul the wet stuff back to the fifth floor every week. As a youngster I used to help her to do it. I still remember how heavy it was!"

We found the church open and empty, all the worshippers had already gone home, except for some old women who were praying near the statues of Madonna and some saints. We went to the *Sacrestia*,<sup>2</sup> where the priest was almost ready to leave. Giulio explained to him, "Father, we wanted to get married as soon as possible because we just arrived from Germany and are expecting a baby to be born in about a month."

The priest looked at us benevolently and asked, "Are you both Catholics?"

Giulio answered, "I am. And she was baptized in the Christian Russian Orthodox church."

"My children," answered the priest, "before I could marry you, the young woman must change her faith and become a Catholic. She has to attend catechism lessons with the nuns, pass the exams, and take the Sacraments. Then we have to make the public announcement about marriage and wait for at least two weeks to see if there are any objections to this marriage by anybody. It cannot be done in a hurry."

Giulio translated his answer. I said, "Ask the priest why I have to become a Catholic if both religions are Christian?"

The priest smiled and in a sweet voice said, "My child, because it is the rule of the Catholic Church." He assumed that this explanation was sufficient for me and, if I

wanted to get married in his church, I would change my religion without asking other questions. "Go and talk to the nuns." He said, "They will tell you when to come for the lessons."

Giulio translated it and suggested, "Let's talk to the nuns and find out how much time you will need to attend these lessons." I agreed and we went to see the nuns.

One of the nuns approached us and Giulio explained to her what the priest had told us.

"Well," she replied, "the lessons are given only on Saturdays to children whom we prepare for the First Communion; for them it takes many weeks, but you are welcome to come too. We can arrange to have your exams sooner. It will depend on how quickly you would memorize all the prayers and the answers to the questions from the Catechism." She gave me a booklet of prayers so I could start to memorize some of them and told me to come next Saturday at nine o'clock in the morning.

We left, very discouraged by our prospects to get married before the birth of our baby. As we exited the church, Giulio suggested, "Lala, I don't feel like going home right away. Let's walk in the neighborhood and talk. Maybe we could make sense out of what we just heard from the priest and the nun."

"I think it is a good idea of discussing it before making a decision," I said and added, "I am also eager to be alone with you for a while longer."

We walked arm-in-arm at a leisurely pace and reasoned about what we should do with my conversion to the Catholic religion. Finally, Giulio concluded categorically, "It is out of the question, we don't have the time for all this nonsense! We need to register you right away in the City Hall for the residency to receive the food coupons, and we have no choice but to use your temporary passport. I am sure that with this document I could also register you at the STIPEL office as my wife. This will cover us also financially for the family benefits,<sup>3</sup> and for the health insurance,<sup>4</sup> which includes doctor's visits and hospital stay for the childbirth."

Then he reasoned further, "However, if we are not going to be married in church, then we shall get married in the City Hall. We have to get married legally in any way that is quick. Maybe there, we could do it on time to be able to register our baby as being born to the legally married parents."

He thought for a while and came up with an idea, "Tonight I will ask my father if among his acquaintances he knows a lawyer to counsel us on how it could be done quickly, because the regulations about the announcements of marriage and the waiting period should be the same as in the church. But there might be some exceptions to this rule that the lawyers should know."

"Giulio," I said, "then you have to tell your father that we are not legally married."

"Not necessarily," he replied. "I told them that it will take very long time for our certificate of marriage to arrive from Poland and they agreed that we need it before the baby is born."

"But now, that we decided not to go through with the church wedding," I asked, "could this explanation be as convincing for getting married in the City Hall?"

"Why not?" replied Giulio. "This does not change the fact that we need this document as soon as possible. Let's not change this story any more. Do you agree?"

I replied, "I agree."

"Good, then we shall not have any more discussions about it," concluded Giulio

as a final statement on this question.

Although I agreed with him, I still wondered, "Why are you afraid to tell your family the truth that the Soviets didn't allow their citizens to get married with the foreigners and that the only way to remain together was to buy the certificate of marriage?"

"My dearest Lala," exclaimed Giulio. "You are a very intelligent girl, but you are so innocently inexperienced in life. You believe that all people are good and that you can always trust them to treat you fairly. The prejudice and habit of judging the others for their transgressions of traditions and rules of conduct existing for centuries are hard to die, even in my own family. And gossip and malignity are the people's favored pastimes. I have to do what I think is best for your protection."

He pulled me closely to him and explained, "We don't have to tell my parents or anybody else that there is no record of our marriage in Poland. They had to assume that what is written in your temporary passport is true, that we are legally married." He said this with strong emphasis on the word 'legally.'

"This means that you have certain legal rights as my wife and that I, as your husbands, have the legal obligations toward you. And it also means that my parents, relatives, and all the others should respect you and treat you as my wife. In our hearts and minds we know that we made a commitment to each other that we are married. There should not be any doubt about it also in the minds of others. I don't want you or our child to be subjected to any kind of humiliation for this reason, neither now nor in the future."

I was overwhelmed by his thoughtfulness to protect me from the harm that others could cause me. "Oh, my dearest Giulio, how lucky am I to have you by my side. What I would do without you?"

He corrected me, "What we would do without each other? I need your love and devotion as much as you need mine." And he squeezed tight my arm and hand to make me feel our togetherness.

We walked for a while in silence, reflecting on the decision that we just made. Then Giulio said, "You know Lala, from the time we arrived here last evening, except for a few brief moments, this is the first time that we are alone." And he candidly confessed, "Last night and this morning I missed the happy moments of being close to you and to express freely our affection as we used to do from the time we have been together."

I replied, "Giulyenka, I missed you too."

"It is so strange," he pondered, "but I don't feel at ease to hug you and to kiss you in the presence of my mother, as I did when we lived with your mother."

I concurred with his perception, "I felt this right away as we arrived and you presented me to your mother. It was like you were afraid to reveal to her your true feelings for me."

"I think it's because I never saw my mother and my father express their affection for each other in the presence of Domenico and me, like it was not a proper thing to do."

He squeezed my hand again, as if this was helping him to reassure me, "Soon we shall find our own place to live where we shall be free to behave as we were used to."

I wished, "I hope that it would be very, very soon."

He squeezed my hand again several times as if he was reinforcing his promise, "My dearest Lala, I promise you that I will try really hard to find it as soon as possible."

We were walking arm-in-arm as we used to do in Laband. We didn't pay any

attention to the strangers who were passing by, as probably they did the same. I felt Giulio's arm holding tight my arm close to his body, the warmth of his hand and the pressure of his fingers intertwined with mine made me feel secure that nothing and nobody could change our need of each other.

We were distracted from our thoughts by a large and very nicely decorated display of women's clothing in a shop window. I looked with curiosity on the styles of the winter dresses and coats. "The hems are still very short," I remarked.

"Fabrics are expensive," commented Giulio, "if they want to sell them they should use less material."

"It is good for me," I made practical conclusion. "I could use all my dresses and coats if they would fit me after the baby is born."

As we walked further, Giulio said, "I will show you a part of this neighborhood where I grew up; where as a child I played and went to school; where as a youngster I ran the errands for my mother in the small shops to buy milk, bread or wine; and where on some Sunday afternoons I went to the second-rate movie theaters. This part of the city is called *Barriera Di Milano*."<sup>5</sup>

"I am curious to see the places that are dear to you," I said. "It is the part of you that I know very little about."

We went along several blocks of the wide *Corso Giulio Cesare* where the newer multi-story apartment buildings had some style in architecture and many had the whole front of the building proudly showing off ornate individual balconies and the shops were all smaller in size and most of the merchants didn't bother to display their merchandise even if they had modest display windows. Giulio showed me the many shops that his mother patronized: beef-meat butcher, horse-meat butcher, delicatessen, dairy shop, bakery, wine shop, pastry shop, and tobacco shop. Some of them were on the ground floor in the apartment buildings after *Palermo Movie Theater*, some in the same building where his family lived, or opposite it on the other side of the street.

When we reached the corner of *Corso Palermo* and turned right, I recognized that it was the apartment building on *Corso Novara*, 25. I could see now that on the corner there was a barber shop, beauty parlor, and a grocery shop before the main entrance door, and on the other side of the door there was a man's hat shop. Further on, all the way to the corner of *Via Favria*, was some kind of a workshop.

"Well," said Giulio, "now you have acquainted yourself with the working class neighborhood where I grew up. It is a modest place, but it has everything that the family needs. Tomorrow you shall go with Mamma to the open market that is not far from here on the market square where *Corso Novara* and *Corso Giulio Cesare* are crossing. She goes there every morning to buy fresh vegetables and fruits for the day. Then she buys bread, meat, wine, and other products in the shops on *Corso Palermo* and some things she buys in this grocery shop of Signor Prato in our building, although she doesn't like his shop because he keeps everything more expensive than his competitors."

With Giulio's help I slowly made the four flights of stairs to the fifth floor and had to rest several times to catch my breath. Giulio joked, "Be patient, Lala, these are the last weeks that you have to carry our baby on the stairs, after I will be carrying him."

"Or her," I corrected him.

"Of course, I am just teasing you."

"Ciao, Mamma," we said entering the kitchen.

"We made a big circle walking in our neighborhood," Giulio explained to justify our long absence.

"Have you made a date with the priest for your wedding?"

"Well, Mamma, we would not be able to get married in church before the baby is born," Giulio replied with resignation.

Surprised with such answer she asked, "Why not?"

He explained that we needed more time to satisfy the rules of the Catholic church.

"Those darned priests," she reacted with disdain, "they have always something new to invent!"

Giulio replied calmly, "Well, we will try to do it in the City Hall."

I paid attention that this change of place didn't cause her to ask any questions, and I thought, "Giulio was right, they believe that we are already married and that we need to do it again here to have our document sooner."

He explained to his mother, "As for tomorrow, I think that Lala's temporary passport probably will be a valid document to register her in all offices."

That evening Domenico didn't come home for supper and we waited only for Babbo to eat our evening meal. While Giulio and I were away, Mamma prepared for the supper Giulio's favored chicory salad and she fried potatoes just before we sat at the table.

"It tastes so good," he said to his mother. "The closest to it that I could find in Poland, were the young and tender dandelion leaves, which we collected with Lala in the spring."

He asked me in French, "Do you like it?"

"Yes, but I find it more bitter than dandelions," I said, "but, it is tastier with lots of garlic and a little of olive oil and vinegar dressing."

His mother was curious about what I said and he translated it to her. I saw that it was bothering her when Giulio was talking with me in French, because she couldn't understand it.

This time after we finished eating, I got up before Giulio to help Mamma to clear the table and to dry the dishes while Giulio remained to talk with Babbo. Babbo exploded in indignation when he heard about our visit to the Parish and priest's request that I convert to Catholic faith; and especially about the time needed to attend Catechism lessons given by the nuns only on Saturdays. He had very strong anti-clergy convictions and made a long monologue on that subject.

Giulio and his mother listened patiently, because they knew that when he was in that mood, he could not be interrupted or contradicted without being upset. And I couldn't understand what he was saying in Italian.

Finally, Babbo exhausted his repertoire of anti-church and anti-clergy words and phrases and Giulio got the opportunity to tell him, "There is only one other place to have the certificate of marriage sooner, it is to get married in the City Hall." And he asked him, "By any chance, maybe you know some honest lawyer who could advise us on how to expedite this procedure?"

Babbo scratched his bald spot on the head and gave him a positive answer, "On Monday I would talk about this with our company's lawyer. I heard that he had given help to some of my co-workers when they needed legal advice. Giulio right away

translated it to me in French and added with the proverb, "When one door closes, God opens another one."

Then he and his father began talking about the political events that happened in Italy during the last two-and-half years when Giulio was a prisoner of war in Germany and had no news from home. At some point in their conversation, Babbo pulled out of his billfold a brand new Communist Party membership card and proudly showed it to Giulio.

"I always thought that you were a socialist," remarked Giulio. "Why have you changed the party?"

"Socialist party is too soft," Babbo answered in an authoritative manner and added with the slogan that probably he heard at some party rally, "The future of the Italian people belongs to the Communist Party." He looked proudly at Giulio, as if he wanted to impress him that he really believed in the communism and knew what he was talking about.

Then, with the tone of wisdom, he gave him a long lecture, "It is very important, especially now that the Party Chairman is the long time Communist Party leader, Comrade Togliatti.<sup>6</sup> Under his leadership we shall win these elections. Do you know that he lived in exile in the Soviet Union and learned their system first hand? When Communist Party comes to power, we—he said 'we' giving it big importance and pointing to himself, like he was included in that 'we'—shall give freedom, justice, and rights to the people of this country."

Giulio listened very patiently to his father's ideas and finally asked him, "How do you know that the Soviet system is better then the one we had under Mussolini?"

Babbo raised his voice as if he was shocked that his son could doubt his wisdom and asked, "What kind of asinine question is that?! The answers are easy to find, all you should do is to read the Communist newspaper '*Unita*' and go to the Communist Party meetings and rallies!"

"Well," answered Giulio disregarding his father's intolerance to being contradicted, "I heard first hand about the Communist system from the Russians who fled from Soviet Union. And it is a different story..."

His father didn't allow him to finish his sentence and promptly replied with absolute conviction, "Those are the tales of the White Russians<sup>7</sup> who fought against the revolution and against the Communists; they are afraid of being found out that they are counter-revolutionaries and be punished for it. Otherwise, why would they run away from their own country?" He looked proudly at Giulio convinced that he was politically more educated than his son.

Giulio couldn't resist showing his father that he was a patsy of the Communist propaganda and began to ask him question, "Babbo, you mean that if the Communists would win the elections and shall come to power in Italy, they would punish all those who..."

"Listen, Giulio," Mother cautiously interrupted him when she detected the warning signs that her husband was becoming contentious, "it's time for your father to go to bed. He has to work tomorrow and needs to get up very early in the morning."

Babbo pulled out his pocket watch and said, "We talked too long. It's late, I better go to sleep."

"Giulio," Mother prompted, "get the couch's linen out of the wardrobe in the

bedroom, so you will not disturb your father later.”

After Giulio came back with the linen, he talked about something with his mother. I saw her giving him a clean towel and after wishing us good night she followed her husband to the bedroom.

Giulio told me, “On Sunday nights Domenico comes home late. I asked Mamma if you could use this time to wash yourself, because you need to freshen up after the trip. She always keeps the water warm in that big water-basin built in on the back of the stove.” He pulled out from under the sink a medium size round metal basin and placed it on the floor. “Do the best you can in this. I washed myself already last night.” He opened the oven door to keep me warm and poured hot water in the basin and I added cold tap water with a small pot. After I washed myself the best I could, Giulio washed my back, warmed up a towel near the oven, and while I was drying myself, he poured the water from the basin in the sink and mopped the wet floor.

When Giulio finished cleaning up, I had already put on my nightgown. He kissed gently my neck and said, “Now you are clean as a little angel. You smell heavenly of soap and water. Come over here on the couch and sit next to me. I want to feel you close to me for a while before my brother arrives.” But the expectation that Domenico could come home at any moment and a suspicion that his parents could hear us in the other room, kept us restrained in expressing our affection.

“What is happening to us?” he asked. “I don’t feel at ease even in kissing and caressing you, as if I am afraid of being caught in the act of doing something wrong.”

“I also feel very uncomfortable.” I said. “Maybe I better go to share the bed with my new companions.”

With disappointment in his voice Giulio replied, “We need to find soon some solution to these awkward sleeping arrangements.” He got up and said, “Stay here and watch me preparing a sleeping place for Domenico and me.”

He moved the kitchen table a little farther from the couch, placed the four chairs next to it with the backs toward the table. Then he placed the couch cushions on the chairs and covered it all with a bed sheet, neatly tucking it under the cushions to hold them together. He placed each pillow on the opposite ends and explained, “This way there is more room to spread our arms.” On top he placed another bed sheet and a blanket. “That’s how the two of us used to sleep when we were growing up and when we were grown-up. I always slept on the side of the chairs and cushions where it is bumpy and less comfortable.”

I commented, “Now I am just beginning to learn how you lived in your family.”

We heard the steps on the balcony and Giulio said, “That’s Domenico. Quick, give me a good night kiss and go to the bedroom before I will open the door.” I sneaked into the bedroom and cautiously crawled on the very edge of the bed, although there was plenty of room from the middle of it where Giulio’s mother was sleeping. That night it took me a long time to fall asleep, I missed terribly to have Giulio cuddled next to me and I knew that he was missing me too.

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1. See the chapter “Giulio Is Growing Up”.

2. Sacristy, vestry.

3. *Assegni Familiari [in Italian]* - Family Allowances in addition to the worker’s wages.

4. *Mutua [in Italian]* - Health Insurance Association.

5. The borough of the city of Turin that got its name from the ancient Customs Station - *Barriera*

*di Milano.*

6. Palmiro Togliatti, Chairman of the Italian Communist Party after World War II.

7. Belonging to the White Army who fought against the Red revolutionaries in the Civil war, 1919-1921.

## Busy Monday For Giulio

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

Monday, after the good morning kiss by Giulio, the routine was the same as the day before. However, I was somewhat less conscious of being observed because Domenico and Babbo had already gone to work and Mamma was ironing Giulio's shirt. She had already pulled one of Giulio's suits out of a wardrobe and hung it on the clothesline off the balcony to remove naphthalene smell. Giulio was collecting all the documents that he needed for the registrations in all the offices today.

"You better go earlier," suggested his mother, "before they open the doors in the City Hall. There are always long lines and sometimes one has to wait many hours. And if you don't come to the office window before their lunch time, you have to wait two extra hours before the employees return to the office."

She asked Giulio to take the suit from outside and she pressed out wrinkles that formed during Giulio's long absence from home.

When Giulio came out of the bedroom all dressed up in a white and blue check pattern wool suit, blue shirt and a blue-striped white silk necktie, he was so elegant-looking that I could not believe that it was my Giulio whom I used to see dressed in his air force uniform, or in the second-hand suit he purchased at the market at Katowice.

"It fits me to perfection," he said turning around to show the back of the suit.

"I don't recognize you," I commented, "you are not an aviator any more, you are a gentleman."

"You have to get used to my new appearance," he advised me. "I have several suits that were made after I returned from Spain. The uniform has served its purpose. Now I am a civilian, or I will be as soon as I get a discharge from the Air Force today."

Meanwhile, his mother was giving the last pressing touches to his raincoat. She even helped him to put it on. Before leaving Giulio gave a kiss on his mother's cheek and said, "Thank you, Mamma, for pressing my clothes." And then he came to me and kissed me also on the cheek. At that moment I felt as if I were being pushed out of importance in his life by his mother's caring for and pampering him. I felt as if I were only a spectator observing her ritual of obsessive mothering.

That morning I helped the Mother in the bedroom to make the big bed, the task that I learned to do the day before. But this time she showed me that I should not walk around the bed, but to step on the quilted pads made from several layers of recycled old wool cloth and to slide on the floor.

Then she showed me how to dust and to polish the waxed ceramic tile floor with those pads. It was so simple. With both feet on the pads she was sliding in a circular motion slowly moving in the passageway and pushing it under the furniture as far as her foot would reach. When the pad collected enough dust she would shake off the pads

out the open window; the dust puffs would fly away, picked up by the air currents that were quite strong at the height of the fifth floor. She left me to finish polishing the floor while she was dusting the furniture. I think that she was satisfied that I was a fast learner.

When we finished with the bedroom routine, Mamma took her coat and showed me that I should do the same. She took a large canvas market bag and I understood that we were going to the market. It was a couple of city blocks away on the square where Corso Novara and Corso Giulio Cesare were crossing. It was an open market with the tables placed in rows; some were with canvas roofs and sides for protection from wind and rain.

There were mostly merchant vendors reselling at retail price the produce they were buying on the wholesale market. There was also a section where the small farmers were selling their produce, but they didn't have tables and displayed their produce in the baskets and boxes placed on the ground.

Compared to the market in Katowitz, there was much greater variety of fruits and vegetables, some of which were not known to me. Besides fresh produce there were also vendors who had some other non rationed food products, such as fish, cheese, and legumes; and there were a few vendors selling some household items.

I observed that Mamma had her preferred vendors whom she knew and who saluted her as an old customer. She bought several kinds of vegetables: potatoes, carrots, celery, onions, leeks, cabbage, and endive, and a piece of pumpkin. She said that it was for *minestrone*, as it is called Italian vegetable soup that Giulio liked very much. She also bought some apples.

On our way home we stopped on Corso Palermo at the bakery and she bought, with the bread coupons, white buns. I saw that with the baker she didn't have such a good rapport as she had with the vendors on the market. She was arguing with the baker because, as I understood, he was giving her buns with pallid crust and she was demanding he exchange them for more toasted ones and the baker was reluctant to do that. She exited the bakery complaining about the baker's arrogance with customers.

Before going to the market Mamma had placed on the stove a big pot to boil dry beans. As soon as we returned, she began to clean vegetables and gave me potatoes to peel and wash and she added them to the boiling beans. Then I helped her to scrape the carrots while she chopped on the wooden board with *mezzaluna* the onions, leeks, celery, carrots, and the well washed in several waters endive. She sautéed with olive oil in a big sauce pan all chopped vegetables and then, a few minutes before pouring it all in the boiling pot, added to it canned tomato paste. The last one to be added was the cabbage, cut coarsely with a knife.

That morning I learned the names of vegetables and a few action verbs as Mamma was telling and showing me what to do as I helped her to prepare the soup. *Minestrone* was ready before Babbo came home for lunch. I had set the table and, because Mamma decided that Giulio would not come home on time since he had to go in too many places, the three of us had our meal together.

I understood that Babbo asked his wife if I helped her and she gave a positive answer. Babbo's routine after lunch was the same as yesterday, reading the communist newspaper "Unità" before returning to work. He exchanged some news with his wife and pointed again to me some headlines. This time, I smiled and nodded, like I approved of

what was written there. He liked that.

I helped Mamma to clear the table, but she didn't wash the dishes right away. Instead, after Babbo left for work, she placed the chair on one side of the couch, put the arm cushion on the high side panel and rested her head on her folded arms; she invited me to rest in similar way on the other side panel. I was surprised that she didn't sit on the couch and therefore I didn't dare to sit on it either. Besides, I remembered that Giulio told me that it was not allowed in their home to sit on the couch; they only slept on it at night.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, I sat on the chair near the table and tried to read the newspaper left by Babbo. I found out that it was much simpler to read Italian than French and that my knowledge of French helped me to understand many words that had the same Latin origins and I could make some sense of what I was reading.

Mamma rested for about half-an-hour and then began to wash the dishes while I helped her by drying them. As she was putting the dishes in the small niche in the wall that was adapted for storage, she gave me a broom and I swept the ceramic tile floor in the kitchen. She showed me how to collect the sweepings in the dustpan and to bring it outside to the balcony where there was a small garbage chute located next to the latrine door.

Then she took the mop holder with the long handle and the mopping cloth, filled the pail with water, added some cleaning powder, and meticulously mopped and dried the kitchen floor, ending at the door to the balcony. We both had to get out and wait on the balcony to let the floor dry completely so there would be no footmarks left when we reentered. Meanwhile she rinsed the floor in the latrine by splashing it with the water from the pail.

When we entered the kitchen she said with relief, "Now I can sit and read the newspaper." I understood it only because I saw her taking it and sitting at the table to read.

I went to the bedroom and brought out our second suitcase that was filled with the baby layette, diapers, and blankets that I prepared for the baby from the recycled items that we found in abundance in our neighbors apartment.<sup>2</sup> I placed the suitcase on the table, opened it and began proudly to show her the little shirts, sheets, blankets, and diapers, which I had carefully hemmed with the blanket stitch or crocheted on the edges with colored yarns. All sheets and diapers I had made from the bed linen; fine undershirts, caps and pillowcases for a little pillow, from the hand-made lingerie in fine batiste that was decorated with lace; the flannel shirts and light blankets, from some garments found in the same place. My aunt had given me several knitted sweaters and many other baby clothes when her little son Igor outgrew them.

Giulio's mother was impressed that I made so many clothes for the baby. She inspected very carefully the baby-shirts with the hand-made French and welt seams, the lace, and entre-deux work. She was very curious, if I made it myself. I explained to her, mostly by showing with my hands, what I made and what was already decorated on the women's lingerie that I recycled. I couldn't tell for sure how much she understood from my explanation, but I felt that she appreciated the fine workmanship. She remarked, however, that I had only two pairs of booties and she promised to knit a few more pairs.

Giulio came home in the middle of afternoon. He was in a good mood and cheerfully said, "While I am telling you about my accomplishments, you, Lala, put on

your good dress and arrange your hair. We have to go to the photographer; we need the pictures for identity cards and for my STIPEL ID card."

His mother said, "You didn't have any thing to eat from this morning. I made *minestrone*; it is still warm. While she gets ready, you sit down and eat. I bet you didn't taste anything like this from the time you left home." I heard from the bedroom how Giulio was complimenting his mother for her cooking.

I quickly got ready and returned to the kitchen when Giulio was telling to his mother, "You were right, there were very long lines everywhere, but I was able to complete everything that I needed to do." With obvious satisfaction on his face, he pulled out his and my food coupons and gave them to his mother saying, "Here, they are all yours. You don't have to worry any more about feeding us."

She said with relief, "Bravo, this will make my task of getting the food on the table little bit easier, especially there will be enough bread for everybody."

"Your temporary passport," he said to me, was accepted everywhere without any questions as a document identifying you as my wife. They registered you as a resident and this qualified you right away for the food coupons."

And then talking to both of us he announced, "But I have more good news. I received an unlimited discharge from the military service and they told me to return in one week to the Air Force Gathering Post<sup>3</sup> to receive a two months allowance to which I am entitled for the war duty."<sup>4</sup> All excited, he asked us, "Could you guess how much I will receive?" We both had no idea and didn't even dare to guess. Giulio proudly announced, "It would amount to more than four thousand liras!"

When his mother heard that Giulio was receiving that much money a big smile illuminated her face and she exclaimed joyfully, "Thank God!"

But Giulio corrected her promptly, "Thank to Mussolini!"

And I thought, "Who could blame her for being happy for her son who came home without one cent in his pocket? This morning on the market I saw the food prices were high and she is justifiably concerned with having to feed two more mouths."

"And this is not all!" Added Giulio with a touch of suspense, in Italian and in French,

Mamma and I looked at him with an anticipation of big news.

"I kept the best news to tell you the last," he announced. "I will start my work at the STIPEL only on November first. But, listen to this, when they registered me in the office and I told them that I got married this year, the employee informed me that I was entitled to two weeks marriage leave with gratuity. Therefore, beginning from today STIPEL gave me two weeks of the paid marriage leave, which the company had to give according to the Fascist Law<sup>5</sup> to all employees when they marry." He looked at his mother and jokingly repeated, "Thanks to Mussolini! Starting from this morning I am already receiving my daily wages."

Then he said to me in French, "I have also received the two health insurance cards, for me and for you. And we may use them immediately. I have a list of doctors who accept it. We have to make an appointment right away for you to check when the baby is due. As I expected, the insurance would also pay for the hospital care for the childbirth." Giulio put his arms around my shoulders and said reassuringly, "Dear Lala, now you know that your husband will be able to provide for you and for our child."

I answered, "Most of all, I am glad that now we shall not be a financial burden to

your parents and could afford to live independently as soon as we find an apartment."

His mother wanted to know what we said to each other and Giulio translated it to her.

When she heard my answer to Giulio, she rather harshly asked Giulio, "She doesn't like to live with us? Why she wants to have your own apartment?"

"Mamma," he replied in a reconciliatory manner, "this apartment is too small, especially now that with the baby there will be six of us living here."

"We can find a bigger apartment," she said promptly as if she had already thought about the solution to this problem and she explained, "With the three men working, we could afford to pay a higher rent and find a better apartment with one extra bedroom for you."

"Mamma," Giulio said very gently, "without meaning to reproach you, I would say that you are returning to your old dream of moving to a better apartment. You know that Babbo never wanted even to hear about it."

"But now, with both, Domenico and you, living with us, it is completely different situation," she defended her idea and explained her plan. "I could slowly persuade your father and convince him to change his mind. Of course, we need to be patient, because it would take some time for me to do it."

Giulio shook his head in a sign of disapproval, but he did not argue with her any more. He just said, "Mamma, we need to hurry to make the photos. There is plenty of time to discuss it later." And he said to me, "Say 'Ciao' to Mamma and let's go!"

On our way to the streetcar stop I told Giulio that I could not understand why he was arguing with his mother. Giulio explained what his mother was arguing about. "She thought that you don't like to live with the family and she didn't like that you expressed a desire of having our own apartment."

I asked him, "Didn't you tell her that both of us want and need to have a place of our own?"

"It was not the right time to tell her about it. If I had told her that, she would have become even more upset by confirming her belief that you and I don't like to live with them. One needs to be a little bit diplomatic. I know that Babbo would never agree to change to the more expensive apartment. Let him, and not us, to disillusion her from her old dream."

"In my family," I replied promptly, "we were used to telling our opinions and ideas to each other and to discussing the ideas about what we shall do without being offended that the others thought differently."

Giulio looked at me and said very calmly, "Dear Lala, if you want to live in peace in my family, you have to learn to understand their characters and to treat them accordingly. I had watched several times my mother, as she listens with a suspicion to our talking in French, because she does not understand it."

"How complicated is the life in your family," I replied. "It will be hard for me to be always on guard, guessing the mood and the thoughts of your parents, to anticipate their reaction to what I am telling before I say something that could upset them."

"You can try," he said, "you just may succeed."

We took the streetcar and I asked Giulio, "Where did you get the money for the tickets?"

"I borrowed yesterday some money from Domenico, I didn't want to ask it from

my mother."

We arrived at the business area of the city and walked to Piazza Castello, where Giulio knew the photo-studio of Colombo.<sup>1</sup> Giulio asked to make our photos for the ID Cards and the photographer quickly clicked his camera without bothering and fussing with our posing for it. He told Giulio that the photos would be ready the next day.

In no time, we were outside and Giulio showed me the Old Castle Square with the ancient Royal Castle and the old classical style buildings. Giulio didn't want to go too far from the streetcar stop, because it was the busy time of the day when the people were beginning to return from work and he didn't want me to travel when the streetcars would be full to capacity.

We arrived home before Domenico and Babbo returned from work. While Giulio and I were setting the table he talked with his mother. "Well, Mamma," he asked, "how did you get along with Lala today? Did she help you to do your daily chores?"

"Yes, she did, but I had to show her everything, because she doesn't understand if I only tell her what she should do."

"Then you should show and tell her at the same time and she will learn the words. The next time when you tell her, she would understand what you want her to do. Please, Mamma, be patient with her. I promise you, she will learn fast." Then he looked at me and asked, "What new Italian words have you learned today?"

I recited all the names of the things, vegetables, and commands that I remembered. "You see," he said to his mother, "she remembers them all."

"I guess, maybe she will learn," she said as if she was not convinced in my ability to learn so quickly.

"What are you planning to do tomorrow?" she asked Giulio and without waiting for his answer made her suggestions, "If you are free in the afternoon, you should come with me to visit your grandmother and to introduce to her your wife. Also we should go to visit your uncle Duilio and his family, and then all of your cousins. Remember that when we go to visit all your relatives you have to find out who wants to be *la Madrina*<sup>6</sup> and *il Padrino*<sup>7</sup> for your child.

"We have to visit all of them in the afternoon, because all men are working in the first shift and return from work at that time. We probably shall go first to see your uncle Duilio, who is always home, because he repairs the shoes, as he did before, in their kitchen.

"Then we shall go to see your cousins who live close to us at the *Barriera di Milano*. We may start with Derna<sup>8</sup> and Oberto,<sup>9</sup> or maybe with Dina<sup>10</sup> and Enrico.<sup>11</sup> But your cousin Mario,<sup>12</sup> who lives too far, we have to visit on Sunday."

When Giulio translated to me his mother's instructions I was surprised that all the time she was using the word "we." "We shall go." It meant that she was coming with Giulio—she was not telling, "You and Lala should go." But Giulio didn't pay any attention to this, as if it were a normal thing to always have his mother with him when visiting his cousins.

He just replied to her, "I could tell you about what I will do tomorrow when Babbo comes home this evening. All will depend on what he was able to find out for me about his company's lawyer, if he was able to arrange for me to see him and when it shall be." Then he added with satisfaction, "Luckily, I accomplished so much today that I have now plenty of time to occupy myself with all that needs to be done to register our

marriage in the City Hall." And he translated it all to me.

"That unexpected marriage leave shall serve its right purpose," I commented.

That evening before Giulio and I began to set the table his mother warned him, "Giulio, I didn't want to tell you this before, but you forgot that we don't use the couch to sit on it, it is your bed. When we are all sitting at the table you should sit on the small chair that I use with the sewing machine."

Giulio was a very obedient son and after that during the meals he sat on that uncomfortable low chair. I remembered that Giulio told me about this strict rule in their family and I thought, "That's why that couch has been so well preserved for such a long time, from Giulio's childhood until now that he is twenty-nine-years old."

When Babbo came home from work, he had very good news for Giulio, "The lawyer said that he could see you after lunch on Wednesday, October 17, in his office at the Municipal Streetcar Company. You should bring all the documents that you have, no matter in what foreign language they are written, especially your wife's temporary passport and hers and yours birth certificates."

Giulio translated right away this news to me and added, "We shall know soon what we should do next."

While the five of us ate the evening meal, Giulio shared with his father and brother what he had accomplished during the day. Domenico was impressed that his brother was able to accomplish so much in one day. Babbo welcomed the news about the unexpected money Giulio would receive. In the tone of voice and with facial expression of a wise man, he said, "Do you remember, Giulio, when I told you, if you want to have a job security and a steady income, you should find an employment with the public service company? Didn't I give you a good advice? Now, that you have the responsibility as a breadwinner for your family, you will be always able to put bread on the table."

"Yes," answered Giulio, "I remember. But I also should be thankful to Signor Bargerò,<sup>13</sup> who recommended me for this good job at the STIPEL."

The Mother quickly suggested, "You should go and visit Signor Bargerò. He respected you very much. You never know if you may need his help sometime in the future."

"I would like to see him," said Giulio, "he is a very nice person. I think that he will be interested to hear about my adventures during these two and one-half years. I remember how he was interested when I returned from Spain."

That evening after supper Domenico didn't go out. Babbo brought up again his preferred subject of discussion about politics. With the air of a man informed in this field he was repeating what he read in the official Communist newspaper "*Unità*," or what he heard at the party meetings and rallies, or from his comrades, about the promises of the Communist Party to the Italian people and about importance of the upcoming general elections.

I had already begun to learn some of the Italian words that he used, although the meanings of the discussion were still hard for me to follow. Some of the words I only had to learn the Italian pronunciation, because they were the familiar internationally common words that Babbo used, such as, "the communists" was pronounced "*comunisti*", "the party" - "*il partito*", "the elections" - "*le elezioni*", "we shall win" - "*noi vinceremo*", "the Christian Democrats" - "*la Democrazia Christiana*", "the socialists" - "*i*

*socialisti*", "the government" - "*il governo*". My knowledge of French made learning Italian very easy.

And in the context of conversation I could even guess the meanings of the discussion, because Babbo and the Communist Party were always right. Domenico was also supporting his father's side. Therefore, Giulio had no chance to voice his opinion, except when it directly referred to the Soviet system and then he attempted to explain some of its faults and shortcomings. But Giulio's opinion was always contradicted by Babbo, who in an authoritative way was shutting him off.

When Mamma finished washing dishes, I dried them and placed them in their place. Then she put on the table a small box with sewing tools and notions, threads, yarns, and a bag with a bunch of men's socks that needed to be mended. She handed me one sock and, before giving me the other, she slipped in it a wooden egg and asked, "Do you know how to mend?" I have repeated in Italian *rammendare* and nodded to confirm that I understood what she wanted me to do.

She watched me closely as I took the needle, threaded it with yarn and began to mend. I thought, "She wants to check if I am doing it right." I did everything with confidence because in my family we also mended socks and cotton stockings by weaving over the holes with yarn until there was more mending than the original knit. I saw that she was satisfied with my work. Giulio observed his mother and me and when our eyes met, he approvingly nodded and smiled.

The whole evening all five of us sat around the table on the chairs and nobody attempted to sit on the couch, not even Babbo, who was obviously tired after standing all day on his feet in the streetcar selling the tickets.

Babbo was the first one to retire and Giulio took from the bedroom the linen for their couch. Domenico helped him to make their sleeping place. Mamma followed her husband in the bedroom. I saw that Domenico began to undress and I quickly said, "Good night," and walked toward the bedroom door.

Domenico promptly exclaimed, "No! No! No! You don't have to go." And he explained, "I have to get up early tomorrow morning, but you don't."

I remained standing near the door facing away from Domenico until he finished undressing. He slipped quickly under the blanket and said, "You may look now, I will turn my face toward the wall and will not bother you. And you aren't bothering me." He covered his head with the blanket and then made a quick peack-a-boo saying, "I forgot to say good night!" Giulio and I answered cheerfully, "Good night Domenico!"

Giulio took one page of the newspaper, folded it twice and fastened it with a clothespin on the electric cord above the light bulb forming a half-shade toward the couch. Then he sat on the only remaining chair, the small low chair from the sewing machine, and said in a just-audible voice, "Come here and sit on my lap."

"Would it hold both of us?" I murmured back.

He put his arm around my rather wide waist and whispered in my ear, "The two of you are rather heavy, but we will try."

I placed one arm around his shoulders and with the other arm leaned on the table and asked him gently, "How about this way? Is it little bit easier on your knees?"

"It's perfect," he replied.

Sotto voce we shared our thoughts about the events of these two days and made plans for a few days ahead. But we could only dream about a place of our own.

Giulio consoled me, "My dearest, the most difficult times are all behind us. Think only how many obstacles we have overcome and how long it did take us to arrive safely to Italy. Now we have only to have patience to wait for our dream of having our own place. It might be somewhat uncomfortable to live here with my parents and my brother, but we have a roof over our head, a warm place to stay, the food to eat, and a place to sleep." And he added with regret, "Although not together!"

I gave him a gentle kiss and said, "As long as we love each other we shall have patience to wait."

However, our sitting accommodations were becoming not as comfortable as we first felt and I got up saying, "Your poor knees! It is too much for you to hold for long the two of us, baby and me. We better go to sleep."

Giulio accompanied me to the bedroom door; we hugged each other and gave a good night kiss.

"I will miss you in bed," he whispered.

"I will miss you too," I replied and sneaked quietly in the bedroom.

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1. See the chapter "Giulio Is Growing Up."
  2. See the chapter "Chance, Destiny, or the Will of God."
  3. *Regia Aeronautica, "Foglio Di Congedo Illimitato," Torino, 12 Dicembre, 1945* [in Italian], [Royal Air Force, "Order of Indefinite Discharge," Turin, December 12, 1945]. Private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
  4. Ibid; p.2; October 22, 1945; Advance: 500 liras; for all months of war duty: 3,536 liras.
  5. This law was introduced by the Fascist Regime to encourage young people to marry.
  6. The Godmother [in Italian].
  7. The Godfather [in Italian].
  8. "The Franchini's Family Tree," Foglios No. 4 and No. 4 bis - Derna Guidi Cortopassi.
  9. Ibid, Foglio No. 1 - Uberto Cortopassi.
  10. Ibid, Foglios No. 2 and No. 4 - Dina Cervelli Macchi.
  11. Ibid, Foglio No. 4 - Enrico Macchi.
  12. Ibid, Foglios No. 1 and No. 6 - Mario Cortopassi.
  13. See the chapter "Giulio Is Growing Up". Also, from a Contract of teaching employment of *Sig. Barger* as the instructor of the Practical Assembly of the Radio Apparatus in the evening preparatory Courses of Specialization of Radio-Telegraphers for the Italian Armed Forces, 1934, [a gift from private collection of Elsa Barger Rivelli, daughter of *Sig. E. Barger*, 2001].

## Giulio's Grandmother and Uncle Duilio

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

Tuesday morning began with what now became a routine for me. But Giulio wanted to leave early to get the photographs that we needed to apply for our ID Cards in the City Hall. So I only helped Mamma with the bedroom chores. Before we left, his

mother told Giulio, "This afternoon we all shall go to visit your grandmother and introduce your wife." Giulio agreed and promised that we would try to be back for lunch.

First we went to pick up our photos, which didn't come out very good. Giulio's hair was bunched up on one side and one ear was sticking out; I had my mouth half-open.<sup>1</sup> But we needed the photos right away and Giulio decided not to retake them. We walked to the City Hall and had to stay for long time in line for our ID Cards. However, we arrived home in time to help Mamma set the table before Babbo arrived for lunch, when Giulio gave him a report of what he had done that morning.

As soon as Babbo left, both Giulio and I helped Mamma with the dishes. I was surprised that even when we were in a hurry the whole after lunch routine had to be completed, and Giulio had to sweep and mop the floor. When Giulio finished, he said, "It's as I used to help before."

The only thing that Mamma didn't do before we left was to have her after lunch nap.

To get to Giulio's grandmother<sup>2</sup> we had to take a streetcar. She was home alone. The three of us greeted her at the door, "*Ciao, Mamma!*" "*Ciao, Nonna!*"<sup>3</sup> She mumbled something and proceeded to the kitchen.

"Look who is here, Mamma," said Giulio's mother, "Giulio returned home."

Giulio embraced his grandmother, kissed her on the cheek and said again, "*Ciao, Nonna. How are you?*"

"Oh, Giulio... Oh, Giulio..." repeated the Grandmother, as if she could not find other words.

"*Nonna,*" he said placing me in front of her, "this is my wife Lala." The old woman stared at me, like she wanted to remember if she had seen me before.

Giulio's mother said to him, "She probably expected to see your fiancée." Then said to his grandmother, "No, Mamma, this is not Elsa. Giulio has married someone else."

I wanted to embrace her, but she, without saying anything, moved away from me as from a stranger.

"She is also hard of hearing," his mother explained. "And from the time Uncle Pietro disappeared, she is confused and at times it seems that she is losing her mind. Every time I come here she behaves worse and worse."

Then she asked her mother, "Who was helping you this morning? Virginia?" Grandmother moved her head from side to side. "Was it Giuliana?" she asked her again. The old woman nodded. "What is a matter with you?" she reproached her. "Why don't you answer me?"

Grandmother mumbled something again and remained standing with her back against the sink, as if it was giving her support.

Giulio's mother inspected everything in the kitchen and proceeded to do it in the bedroom. Giulio put his arm around Grandmother's shoulders and was talking to her gently, I saw her lips moving, but I couldn't hear her saying anything.

Now that Giulio was standing next to her, I could see that she was very short, with a curved back and frail body. Her hands, with the fingers deformed by arthritis, were clutched tightly below her round belly, as if she were holding it from falling down. Her face was heavily wrinkled and her gray long hair was pulled up, but it was in disarray. She wore an old discolored dress and an apron.

Giulio's mother returned to the kitchen and said to her mother, "Why did you put on that old dress? You have several good dresses in your wardrobe. Pietro was taking good care of you."

"Pietro... Pietro..." faintly repeated the old woman, but couldn't say anything else.

"I have to talk to Verginia to keep you neatly dressed," continued her daughter without paying any attention that her mother was not answering any of her questions. But she continued to tell her about other things that she was finding wrong. She opened the cupboard and inspected what food she had there and rearranged some dishes on the shelves.

"Mamma," said Giulio, "go easy on Grandmother. Don't you see that she is confused?"

"I know, I know," she answered. "We have to do something about her, because she cannot live alone any more. Neither I, nor Uncle Duilio, could take her to live with the family, especially now that you are staying with us. You know that Uncle Duilio also lives in an apartment that has only one bedroom and a kitchen, in which their two daughters are sleeping and where he also works in one corner as a shoemaker?"

She looked around and said, "It would have been a nice place for you to live here with Grandmother, but the authorities notified us already that they were requisitioning the club quarters and that she had to leave this place. I told Uncle Duilio to take care of this matter. He had already put her on the list and she is waiting when there would be a bed available for her at Cotelengo.<sup>4</sup> There are so many old people waiting to be admitted there. Now they are taking only the sick in the emergency cases."

Although there were the chairs in the kitchen, nobody thought to sit down, it seems that for some unknown reason we had to leave at any moment. And it really was the case, because Giulio's mother suddenly decided that we had stayed there long enough and said, "Well, let's go. Maybe this afternoon we will have enough time to visit my brother." She gave a quick kiss on the cheek to her mother and said to her, "Don't forget to lock the door." Giulio also kissed his grandmother and I tried to embrace her, but it was awkward because she tried to withdraw from me, so I reached only with my hand to touch her shoulder.

We waited for a long time for the streetcar, which arrived full to capacity, so Giulio decided to wait for another one, because he didn't want my body to be squeezed too much in my last weeks of pregnancy. Therefore we arrived later than expected at our streetcar stop at Corso Novara.

"Well," said Mamma, "we still could make a quick visit to Uncle Duilio, just to tell him that you arrived home safe and sound and to surprise him with the news that you are married."

Giulio's uncle Duilio lived on the ground floor in the apartment building on one of the side streets, not far from the Parish Church, and we walked again through Via Favria. One window and the entrance door to his kitchen directly faced the narrow sidewalk. Giulio looked through the window, then knocked at the door.

His aunt Verginia quickly opened the door and called loudly, "Giulio! What a surprise! *Ciao, caro!*" She barely allowed him to enter the door before she embraced him.

Uncle Duilio came next to salute his nephew, exclaiming, "Look who is here! How are you Giulio?"

Cousins, Giuliana and Rita followed the example of their parents. With all these

embraces and confusion nobody paid any attention that Mamma and I were standing at the door on the sidewalk and that we couldn't come in because they all were crowded around Giulio and obstructed the passage.

Mamma interrupted their rejoicing by shouting, "May we come in?" Only then did they move away from the door so we could enter.

"*Ciao!*" "*Ciao!*" all saluted us.

Giulio took this moment to present me to his relatives. He put his arm around my shoulders and said, "This is my wife, Lala. I brought her with me from Germany, but she is Russian."

There were a few moments of a surprised silence. Then, bowing their heads, they said, "Nice to meet you!" and "It is a pleasure to know you."

I also bowed in response and only said, "*Ciao! Ciao!*"

And Giulio explained my limited greetings, "She doesn't speak Italian yet."

Everybody smiled and commented something about it, but Giulio did not bother to translate it to me.

We all remained standing in the kitchen and all were asking Giulio questions, which I couldn't understand. Then I saw Mamma engage her sister-in-law in a discussion and they sat at the table. Aunt Verginia invited me to sit next to them. Although I couldn't fully understand what they were saying, I knew that they were talking about Giulio's grandmother. Then Mamma pointed at me and told her that she would soon become a grandmother, and Aunt Verginia congratulated me.

Uncle Duilio and his daughters were standing in the middle of the kitchen and talking with Giulio. I had very little chance to observe them. Finally, Aunt Verginia said that she would make coffee, but Mamma stopped her, "Some other time. It's late and we have to go home now. We just came to tell you that Giulio returned home." She got up and called, "Giulio, we have to go. Babbo and Domenico will be home soon."

And we left in a chorus of voices: "*Ciao!*" "*Ciao!*" "*Ciao!*" "Come back soon!"

As we walked back home, Mamma said to Giulio, "Tomorrow will be already Wednesday; it will be the fifth day that you returned home. We have to go and visit my cousins Derna and Oberto. Just to be sure that Oberto will be home, we will go there late in the afternoon. And on Thursday we should visit my cousins Dina and Enrico. They will be upset if you wait longer from seeing them. We shall visit Mario on Sunday."

"Okay, you are right," agreed Giulio.

"You shouldn't forget that you need to find soon who want to be a godmother and a godfather for your child. When I had mentioned to Verginia that you will have a baby, she didn't volunteer for it."

"There is plenty of time for it, Mamma," replied Giulio.

At the suppertime everything was as usual. Domenico went out right away after he finished eating, but he advised Giulio that he would return home not too late. The evening chores were a repeat of yesterday, with the socks mending as the last chore of the day. Babbo and Giulio again had their discussion about the Italian politics, but either they had a less controversial topic, or maybe Giulio decided not to disagree with his father, who didn't raise his voice even once during the whole evening. Before going to bed, Babbo reminded Giulio not to forget the appointment with his company's lawyer. Domenico came home early, soon after Giulio prepared their couch for the night. I was tired from all that walking during the day and Giulio sent me to bed right after his

brother came home.

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1. From the photographs Photo Colombo, Piazza Castello, Torino, October 15, 1945.
2. See the chapter "Busy Monday For Giulio."
3. "Hi, Grandmother!" [in Italian].
4. A charitable Catholic Institution run by the nuns of the Order of Cotelengo for care of the poor elderly, sick, incapacitated, and handicapped.

## A Provision For Civil Marriage

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

On Wednesday morning, October 17, Giulio accompanied me for a visit to the doctor who found my pregnancy normal and said that we should expect the baby in about three-and-half weeks. From there we went to the Post Office to find out if we could mail letters to Poland and France. Although they were not sure how long it would take for mail to these countries to begin to function, they told us that it could happen any day and we should inquire often. This was good news for me, because I wanted to notify my mother as soon as possible about our safe arrival; also it was important to get my new address to Monsieur Demey, who gave us his address as a reference in case my mother, father and I would be separated in the confusion of the war. I was hoping that maybe he had some news about whereabouts of my father.

In the afternoon we went with Giulio to see the lawyer in his office at the Headquarters of the Turin's Municipal Streetcar Enterprise. On our way there, Giulio told me that if he were going to help us, we would need to explain our saga and exactly why and how we got our certificate of marriage, on the basis of which my temporary passport was issued. I agreed that the lawyer needed to know the truth.

The lawyer's simple and informal manners made us both feel, right away, at ease. Giulio told him that we had arrived only Saturday from Munich on the Red Cross convoy train repatriating Italian prisoners of war from Germany. He presented me as a Russian, or more accurately, a Soviet citizen. And he went on explaining to him that at the end of the war we found ourselves to be in Poland, occupied by the Soviet Army; that NKVD issued strict orders to the local Polish government offices and churches forbidding them to perform marriages between Soviet citizens and citizens of any other country.

"Since we were determined to remain together, because we loved each other," explained Giulio, "and we wanted that our child would have both parents, we tried any possible way to do it legally. The last hope vanished when we asked the Soviet consul in Warsaw<sup>1</sup> to give us permission to marry. His cold and cynic answer was, 'There were millions of children left without fathers during this war. One more will not make any difference. Each of you has to return to your own country. Those are our orders, there are no exceptions!'

"There was no other choice for us, but to find other ways to remain together. That's when we purchased from the town hall employee a certificate of marriage. It was on the official standard form and was stamped with the town hall office seal, but it

wasn't entered in the Registry of Marriages. It allowed us to have a right of passage on the Polish Red Cross convoy train repatriating the Italian prisoners of war. When we arrived in Prague, the Italian consulate checked our documents and issued a temporary passport based on the certificate of marriage, which they kept for their records." And Giulio gave my temporary passport to the lawyer for inspection.

"Well," said the lawyer, "your temporary passport was valid only for the entry in this country, it is not a valid document for any other purpose."

"That's why we came to see you," said Giulio, "to find out if you can help us." Giulio explained further, "Upon our arrival, we went right away in my Parish to make an appointment for a church wedding, but the priest required that we both be Catholics. Since Olga's religion is Russian Orthodox, the priest told her that she had to convert to Catholic faith by taking the lessons in catechism, learning the prayers, and passing the exams. It would take a long time, which we don't have, because our baby will be born in about three weeks."

Then Giulio asked, "Could the civil marriage in the City Hall be done before the birth of our baby?"

"Yes," replied the lawyer. "There is a provision for the civil marriage in the cases of emergency registration. It is very good thing that you are not legally married because one of the requirements is that each of you makes a sworn, witnessed, and notarized statement declaring that you are not and had never been married. In addition to this declaration, you, Giulio, need only your birth certificate. As for the bride's birth certificate, which is in Russian, she needs to have a witnessed and notarized statement written in Italian stating her date of birth, place of birth, and the names of her father and mother."

The lawyer wrote all the instructions and explained to Giulio how and where all this had to be done and how many witnesses we needed for the notarized documents and for the marriage registration. "You can do it all by yourself, you don't need a lawyer to do it."

"I have already used this temporary passport to register Olga in the City Hall for residency, food coupons, and ID Card. Could it become a problem after we get married when the dates and place of marriage change?"

"Did they keep a copy of this document in any of these offices?" asked the lawyer.

"No. They just copied from it her name and the date of marriage."

"Then there shouldn't be any problem to correct it at a later date," he reassured us. "If you should encounter any problems, come and see me in this office at any time."

He didn't want any compensation for his advice, because it was done as a service for a family member of an employee of the Municipal Streetcar Enterprise. He wished us, "Good luck!" We sincerely thanked him for his help and departed from his office in a happy mood.

We were relieved that there were no problems for what only yesterday seemed to be an insurmountable task. Giulio cheerfully said, "Now we really need to visit all my cousins, because we need to recruit some of them to be our witnesses for your birth certificate, for the declaration that we were never married, and for our marriage registration."

When we returned home, the first thing his mother asked was, "What have you found from the lawyer?"

Without going into every detail Giulio told her that there were no problems, that

we could register our marriage in the City Hall, and that it could be done before the baby's birth. Then he looked at his watch and said, "There is not enough time left for a visit to Derna and Oberto."

The suppertime and the evening by now were predictable. However, this time Babbo and Domenico were interested more in our visit to the lawyer. Domenico went out right away after he finished eating, but as he did the previous evening, he advised Giulio that he would return home soon. The remainder of the evening was also the same as yesterday's, including socks mending. Babbo and Giulio again discussed Italian politics, but it was a quiet talk without any outbursts from Babbo, because they agreed on the main expectations of referendum for the elections; they both decided to vote against monarchy and to vote for Italy to become a Republic.

I was eager to write a letter to my mother and, after repairing a few holes in one sock, I asked Giulio to find me paper and pen and to explain to his mother that I needed to do it right away. I began to write my first letter to her in French,<sup>2</sup> as we agreed not to write in Russian for fear that the NKVD could somehow find her. It took me a long time to write, because I couldn't concentrate while Giulio and Babbo were speaking Italian.

As soon as Babbo and Mamma went to bed, Giulio took all the chairs to prepare the couch for the night. I sat on the low chair and quickly finished my letter.

Giulio told me, "Domenico will be home soon. You are tired from all the walking during the day, you better go to sleep before he comes home."

From the previous night we knew that the two of us were uncomfortable sitting on that small low chair and we remained standing as we wished good night by embracing, hugging, and kissing for a while, until we heard Domenico's steps on the balcony.

"I miss you so much, Lala," said Giulio slowly releasing me from his embrace.

"I miss you too, Giulyen'ka," I replied walking toward the bedroom door.

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1. See the chapter "The Trip to Warsaw."

2. See the chapter "Refuge in the Home of Rufin and Lidia."

## Mamma Keeps the Family Purse Strings

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

Thursday morning didn't bring any surprises in the routine of Verro's family, as well as in what was expected of me in contributing to the household chores, including my walking with Mamma to the open market and to the shops to buy fresh provisions for the day, and cooking the meal. That morning Giulio went to STIPEL's office to get his company's uniform and tools.

When he returned home shortly before lunch, he showed us his brand new black leather bag with the tools and the sturdy cotton uniform with the STIPEL name on a shirt pocket and on a cap. He asked his mother to shorten pants and sleeves.

I was unpleasantly surprised that he asked her to do the alterations. "Why didn't he ask me to do it?" I thought. "He knows that I can use sewing machine."

I was distracted from my unhappy thoughts by Giulio's next surprise. With a dramatic gesture he showed us an envelope and declared, "Look what else I have received from STIPEL! Here is the two-week marriage leave gratuity money!"

He pulled out of the envelope some money explaining to his mother that this time he needed to keep larger allowance; he justified that he needed it for the expenses involved with the documents and fees we would need to pay for our marriage certificate in the City Hall, for the streetcar tickets, and a few extra liras he borrowed from Domenico when we arrived. Then, with a humble expression he tendered to his mother the envelope with the rest of the money and said, "Here, Mamma, I hope it will be enough to feed me and Lala until my first payday."

His mother took the envelope, as if she was expecting it to be given to her. As she was counting the money, her face was lighting up with satisfaction and she replied, "Now I don't have to worry about the money. I am glad you remembered to give me the envelope with your wages, as you used to do it before." Then with bitter expression on her face she complained, "You know, from the time Domenico returned to live with us, he is keeping all the money for himself and gives me only what he thinks is enough for feeding him. The rest he spends on...I don't know on what, probably, on 'that girl.' I would like to know if he would have a courage to ask me to buy for him a new shirt, or underwear when he shall need them." And she went to the bedroom to put the money in a safe place.

Giulio turned toward me and explained, "I always gave all my wages to my mother, except, I kept for myself a small allowance, which I also kept now for us. My mother uses the money for the needs of the whole family. We are now a part of this family and, if we should need to buy something we shall ask her if she has enough money in her family kitty, and she will buy it for us."

Mamma returned from the bedroom and told Giulio to put on his uniform so she could mark how much it needed to be shortened.

As the two of them were busy with fitting, I realized that Giulio had presented to me as a matter of fact that in his family Mamma was keeping the family purse strings. What I could say to him? I felt that it was right to contribute our part for living expenses, but at the same time I felt that Giulio completely relinquished control of his money and that both Giulio and I were left out of any decision as to how his money was spent. Even more, I was humiliated by the fact that if we needed to buy something for our personal use, we had to ask his mother a favor to buy it for us.

Then I reasoned, "If Giulio feels that he should give all his wages to his mother, there is nothing that I can do about it. I have no other choice, but to compromise and not challenge Mother's authority over the family's money. Until we find our own place to live, this cannot be done without provoking his mother's discontent, and maybe anger. On the other side, Domenico probably is right to give his mother only a part of his wages."

However, I was very surprised by the contrast of Giulio's behavior here compared to Laband, where my mother had given him all the money that they were making at the market in Katowitz.

There, the three of us had made the decisions on how to spend it and what to buy, or, if the decision had to be made on the spot at the market, the two of them made it together. And, although my mother had more savoir-faire, experience, and initiative in

their market deals, she was treating Giulio as the head of the family. My mother was following our family tradition, where it was my father who kept the money, paid the bills, and kept the record of family budget. And from the time I was only in my teens, the decisions about the major expenses were discussed by all three of us, while the everyday food expenses were in the hands of my mother.

When the fitting was done, Giulio looked at his watch and said to me, "Help me to set the table in a hurry before Babbo arrives for lunch. He gets very angry if the table is not set or the food is not ready, because he likes to have some time to rest after the meal and to read newspaper before he goes back to work." We had just finished setting the table when Babbo arrived, and Giulio helped Mamma to drain the spaghetti.

Giulio proudly told his father about receiving from the STIPEL money, uniform, and tools. Babbo reminded him again, "I am glad that you have listen to me and found a job with the public service company. Besides the job security, you have many other benefits that the other companies would never offer to its workers."

After Babbo was gone, the three of us quickly did all the after lunch chores, including Giulio washing the kitchen floor.

Then we were ready to go and visit Derna and Oberto.

## Meeting Giulio's Relatives

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

Thursday afternoon Mamma, Giulio and I went to visit Mamma's cousins Derna and Oberto. To get to them we had to walk on Corso Palermo past movie theater "Palermo," then turn into a smaller secondary street. They also lived in a multistory apartment house, but it was a better type of building with separate main entrances for each staircase and only two apartments on each landing.

We found both Derna and Oberto home and they received us with lots of affection, embraces, and kisses. It was not a complete surprise for them to see Giulio and me. Derna told us, "Verginia came to see us the other evening, right away after the supper. She couldn't resist the temptation to tell us the news about Giulio's arrival with the foreign wife."

From the first moment I liked both Derna and Oberto, who impressed me with their genuinely pleasant disposition and a sincere hospitality. Derna immediately invited us to remove our coats and to sit down on the couch in the kitchen. Oberto offered Giulio a glass of wine, while Derna put a pot of coffee on the stove.

As we were sipping chicory coffee, Derna asked me when the baby was due; and she complimented me that I had such nice and fresh skin complexion during pregnancy. Mamma took the initiative and said to Derna, "By the way, now that we are talking about the birth of the baby, Giulio wanted to ask you about something." And she prompted her son, "Giulio, now it is the right time to tell Derna about the christening of your baby."

"Oh, Mamma, stop it," replied Giulio, "there is plenty of time to talk about this later."

"No, no," she insisted, "ask her about it now."

"Oh, Mamma!" replied Giulio this time with real annoyance.

"All right," said Derna in a pacifying manner, "what your mother wanted you to tell me?"

"Well," Giulio replied, "let me ask Lala about it first." And he explained to me that he was going to ask Derna to be the godmother for our child if I agreed.

"I like her," I said. "Go ahead and ask.; I will be glad if she would accept it."

Then, with humility, Giulio asked, "Derna, I want to ask you before asking anybody else about this. Would you do me and my wife Lala the honor to be our baby's godmother?"

Derna embraced Giulio and then me and without hesitation replied, "I shall be glad to be your baby's godmother. My god-daughter Fiorina<sup>1</sup> is already looking to find for herself a husband—so I am ready to have another godchild."

"Lala and I are very happy that you accept this responsibility. I know that you were very good godmother to Fiorina."

Mamma was all smiles satisfied with her choice of a godmother for her grandchild and she asked Derna, "Whom you would suggest to ask to be a godfather?"

"Maybe Domenico," answered Derna.

"Are you joking?" replied Mamma. "How could he be a godfather, when he is not able to be a father for his own daughter?"

"Then you should ask Mario. I think that he would be a good godfather," suggested Derna.

"Giulio," said Mamma, "did you hear that? Sunday we shall visit Mario and will ask him about it."

"Yes, Mamma," replied Giulio. "Thank you, Derna, your suggestion."

Giulio decided that this was the opportune moment for him to ask Derna for another favor and explained to her, "We have a problem registering here our marriage, because the City Hall needs an original document to be sent directly from Poland and it will take a long time to wait for it, because the mail service didn't resumed yet; who knows when we could even send a request for it. We need it for food coupons, and medical insurance for doctors and a hospital for childbirth and for the baby."

He told to Derna and Oberto the whole story about the Parish priest who demanded that I become a Catholic; and about a visit to a lawyer who suggested that there was a quicker way to do it. "We just have to get married again in the City Hall before the baby is born! That's when we shall need you Derna to be our witness," concluded Giulio almost jokingly and added, "We also will need your help to witness in the City Hall some documents for us and for Lala."

"Of course," she answered promptly, "just let me know when you shall need me."

"Thank you Derna, I knew that I count on your help."

Oberto, who was quietly listening to all this, now commented, "Everywhere there is a bureaucracy. And the church is the worst." And I was surprised that he also, as was the case with Babbo, made a long monologue against the priests and the church.

Then Oberto and Giulio sat at the table and had good and friendly talk about politics and the coming general elections. Oberto was a simple worker at the factory Villar Perosa, which manufactured ball bearings. Like many Italian workers, he also had communist ideas, but he didn't insist as fervently as did Babbo in trying to convince Giulio that the Communists would win the elections.

Meanwhile, Mamma recounted to Derna about problems with her mother. That much I could already understand without Giulio's translating for me in French.

Since I was not directly involved in these conversations, I had plenty of time to observe. Derna was sitting on the chair almost opposite me, and the more I looked at her, the more I liked her, with round face with full and rosy cheeks and smiling brown eyes which were like a mirror of her cheerful and amiable personality. And the crown of the brown naturally wavy hair added softness to her pleasant facial features. She wore a nice close-fitting dress that followed the shape of her body. All parts of her plump figure were connected with smooth curves, making it hard to see where the neck was connected to the chest and where the arms were connected to the shoulders. I had the impression that she should feel very soft to the touch. She had gentle manners and a smooth harmonious voice, which added to her peaceful and pleasant demeanor.

Oberto was a rather large boned man with a slow way of moving that reminded me of a bear. He was calm, but had a tendency to speak louder than his wife, and his manners were somewhat crude, but not vulgar. However, he displayed a genuine friendliness and hospitality that complemented his wife's attitude.

I had also plenty of time to look around the kitchen. I saw that near the door, which had a large window, stood a treadle sewing machine that was open and had a garment in the process of sewing lying on its table. I got up and went to see what Derna was sewing. It was a dress for somebody else, because it was quite small in size to be for her short and full figure. She saw me inspecting her work and said, "It is for Mario's daughter Fiorina."

I saw that the door led to a small private balcony, which was a sign of better housing. Their apartment had just one bedroom, but it had a small entrance hall and a private toilet, which made it more prestigious. In addition, in the kitchen a portion of the wall was covered with white tiles near the white marble sink, stove, and small counter between them, which made it look neat and bright.

Mamma looked outside the window, asked Giulio what time it was, and said, "If we hurry, we just might visit my cousins Dina and Enrico on our way home."

"That's a good idea," said Giulio. "We have plenty of time before Babbo and Domenico come home." We all got up and, being prompted by Mamma to do it quickly, saluted Derna and Oberto in a real hurry.

Giulio said to Derna, "I shall call on you soon to come with us to the City Hall to witness the documents."

Dina and her husband Enrico Macchi lived with their teenage daughter Iella in a multistory apartment on Corso Palermo only a few houses away from where Giulio's family lived. The buildings were similar, but their apartment was only on the third floor. Mamma told Giulio, "You knock at the door to surprise them."

As the door opened Giulio said, "*Buon giorno*."<sup>2</sup> May I come in?"

Indeed, the happy sound of voices resounded, "Giulio!"

"Giulio! When did you arrive?" And Dina and Iella embraced him with sincere joy.

When Mamma and I entered the room, Giulio presented me, "This is my wife Lala."

I greeted them, "*Buon giorno*!" followed by Giulio's explanation, "She doesn't speak Italian; she is Russian."<sup>3</sup> This seemed to be an even bigger surprise for them than seeing Giulio, because all the relatives knew that he had been engaged and they knew his fiancée. However, they were discrete enough not to ask anything, maybe believing

that I didn't know. But I saw that Dina took Mamma aside and whispered something.

Of course, as soon as I removed my coat, Dina right away asked when the baby was due and Giulio proudly told her, "Soon, in a few weeks."

Dina prepared chicory coffee and served it without sugar, as a matter of fact, no excuses. Soon Dina's husband, Enrico, arrived from work and more surprise, embracing, and presenting me followed.

As conversation began, from a few words that I could guess, I understood that Enrico was curious to hear from Giulio about the situation in Europe, and his daughter Iella listened with attention too, and Mamma was talking to Dina about what to do with her mother.

I sat quietly observing the apartment. It consisted only of a kitchen and a bedroom. I thought, "Probably most of the working class apartments in this neighborhood were built at the same period." The kitchen had a couch on which their daughter probably slept. There was a table and chairs in the middle of the room; a bare electric light bulb hung from the high ceiling. There was a simple cupboard, metal woodstove, and the sink. And there was a small bookshelf with a few textbooks and notebooks that indicated their daughter was going to school.

I changed my observation to people. Enrico was tall and very skinny with a long bony face; and his dark hair accentuated these features. Although he smiled and rejoiced when he greeted Giulio, now in serious conversation he had a somber and almost unhappy expression. His daughter Iella had a bony body and a face resembling her father's, but her teenage face was very homely, more so because of purplish acne patches. But her eyes were lively expressing curiosity as she listened to Giulio's story.

Dina, in contrast, was plump and short, or maybe she seemed to me to be like that because of comparison to her tall husband and daughter. She had nice wavy brown hair and clear complexion. Once in a while she looked at me and smiled, as if she was trying to communicate to me without words her friendly feelings.

We had visited with them for about a half hour when Mamma asked Giulio what time it was and exclaimed, "We have to go, because *Menico*<sup>4</sup> and *Gardo*<sup>5</sup> will be coming home soon." We said a quick "Good-bye" and we left in a hurry.

As we were on our way home, Mamma said to Giulio, "I waited for a while to hear if Dina would ask me if we have someone in mind to be a godmother for your baby. When she didn't mention anything, I told her that we asked Derna and she accepted. It is better this way. Stingy as they are, you couldn't expect from her good gifts for the baby."

"Mamma!" Giulio reproached her, "I asked Derna to be a godmother because she is a very good and kind woman, not because she would give gifts to my child!"

"What is the matter?" I asked Giulio. "Why are you upset with Mamma?" He reluctantly translated their conversation.

We arrived home just in time to get supper ready. I was getting used to the routine and helped Giulio to set the table and helped Mamma with the dishes after the meal. It was a repetition of what happened in previous evenings. After supper Domenico went out again and Babbo talked with Giulio about Italian politics. And then the sewing box appeared on the table and Mamma and I again mended socks. There was a big bunch of them and I estimated that if we mended every evening we definitely would not finish them all before the baby was born.

That evening Domenico returned even earlier than usual and joined in the

ongoing conversation between Babbo and Giulio. Al though the elections were not scheduled until the summer of 1946, Babbo never tired talking about politics. And he always talked in a tone of voice that was meant to impress his sons that he was very knowledgeable in political matters. This meant that Communists were always right, and that they offered a better choice for the workers than any other party. Therefore, the conversation was mostly a monologue because Giulio didn't want to contradict and upset his father.

That evening, I waited until Babbo and Mamma went to bed then followed them shortly thereafter. Giulio gave me a quick good night kiss near the bedroom door, making me understand that in the presence of his brother he didn't feel comfortable embracing and hugging me, as had become our intimate ritual and a way of expressing our affection from the time we arrived in Turin.

It was already the sixth night that I was sleeping with my in laws in their big bed and I was terribly missing Giulio close to me. I rationalized that we were doing all in an order of priorities and that I should have patience. But it was not a consolation for me when in the dark I lay on the edge of the bed, afraid to move and to disturb my mother-in-law.

The next morning, when Giulio came to wake me up, he said to me, "Do you realize, Lala, that today already is Friday. Tomorrow will be a week that we arrived in Italy. It was such a busy week, but we accomplished a lot."

"You have accomplished it," I corrected him.

"We still have another busy week ahead of us," he said. "Today I will go to the City Hall and find out exactly where all the offices are to make all our documents that the lawyer told us to do. Now, next week we need only to call Derna and another two witnesses to go with us. By the way, last night Domenico told me that he would come as the second witness. Now we need to find only the third witness."

When Giulio was gone, Mamma and I went to the market. She stopped on our floor landing to greet one of her neighbors who lived in one of the corner apartments. She presented me to her as Giulio's foreign wife. And she introduced her as *la Signora Bacci*. She proudly said, "She is *la Toscana*,<sup>6</sup> like me."

When Mamma told her that I was Russian and was alone in this country, Signora Bacci showed me a warm friendliness that was very unusual for a neighbor. She embraced me and gave me such a tight hug that, although I was wearing a light coat, I felt her skinny body and arms and it made a strange impression on me.

When mamma and I were walking to the market, Mamma explained that Signora Bacci had a breast cancer, but that she had refused to have her breast removed, because she was convinced that some cure would be found very soon and she didn't have to be mutilated.

When Giulio returned home, Signora Bacci came to greet him and brought homemade cookies as a homecoming gift for him and me. With the shortage of sugar at that time it was a truly friendly gesture. Mamma later explained that Signor Bacci was a very good master marble mason and earned good money, so they could afford to buy sugar and all rationed foods on the black market.

Giulio took this occasion to explain and to ask Signora Bacci if she could be our third witness for the procedures in the City Hall. She gladly accepted it.

Giulio set the date for doing all preliminary papers for Monday morning on

October 22. And he went to notify Derna to come with us on that date.

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1. Daughter of Mario Cortopassi, "The Franchini's Family Tree," Foglio No.6.
2. "Good day!" [in Italian].
3. Soviet citizens were commonly called Russians without distinction to their nationality, as Ukrainian in my case.
4. Nickname name for Domenico.
5. Nickname name for Ermengardo (Giulio's father).

## Uncle Pietro's Mattresses

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

On Friday, late in the afternoon, Mamma's niece Giuliana unexpectedly brought the bad news, "Today Grandmother fell and broke her hip and she couldn't move or talk; she probably had a stroke. My father arranged to bring her to Cotelengo's emergency room. He is hoping that after she recovers she would be admitted to the Cotelengo's nursing home, because it is an emergency case and she was already on their waiting list."

Mamma asked her niece about visiting hours at the hospital and told her niece that she would go to visit her mother tomorrow afternoon. She told Domenico, "You are coming with Giulio and me to visit your grandmother too, therefore, don't plan to go anywhere until we return from Cotelengo."

On Saturday morning Giulio got up very early, sometime before six o'clock, and went to the public bathhouse to be among the first to enter when they opened their doors at seven. At that hour the line was short and he was home before I got up.

"This morning I am clean as an angel," he told me while waking me up with the good morning kiss. "After the baby is born and your body returns to the normal shape I will bring you to take the shower in the bathhouse. You know, there is no privacy there, and right now you probably will feel very uncomfortable that the other naked women will see you." And he added, "This afternoon, when Mamma, Domenico, and I will go to visit my grandmother, you will remain alone at home and should take a bath in the small washtub as you did before."

When after lunch chores were done, including washing the kitchen floor, Giulio, Domenico, and Mamma went to visit her mother at the Cottolengo Hospital. Before leaving, Giulio warned me, "Please, don't wash your hair in the sink—use a little round tub and pour the dirty water in the pail used to wash the floor and discard it outside in the latrine—my mother gets very upset if she finds even one hair in the kitchen sink."

It was a real pleasure to finally be able to take care of my body. I enjoyed my bath but, most of all, I felt good to have my privacy, to be alone without all the people being in the kitchen as happened in the mornings when I washed my face.

When I went outside on the balcony to discard the water in the latrine, I met the woman who lived in the apartment past our door. Giulio told me that his mother did not speak with her neighbor for several years after they quarreled about something. The

woman was washing a patch of balcony floor in front of her door. She smiled at me and said, "I am *Madamin* Sartoris."

I answered, "*Buon giorno!*"

And she asked, "Are you Giulio's wife?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Then you are *Madamin* Verro." I understood and smiled. She wanted to talk to me, but after the warm bath and with the wet hair I didn't feel like staying outside on the cold drafty balcony and, smiling again, I politely told her, "Excuse me, I don't speak Italian."

"Ah!" she exclaimed with surprise and said something that I couldn't understand. And I quickly got inside.

Giulio explained to me later why the neighbor called me *Madamin*: In Piedmontese tradition, when the mother-in-law is living she is referred to as "*Madama*" and her daughter-in-law is referred to as "*Madamin*."

Only Mamma and Giulio returned home. Giulio told me, "Domenico went somewhere directly from the hospital." About his grandmother he said that she was in a very bad condition and didn't recognize them. They couldn't find any answers from the nuns, who told them they should talk to the doctor during weekdays—in this charitable hospital doctors donated their time and services on a voluntary basis and were not available on weekends. One thing was almost sure, Grandmother would not return to her apartment and would remain at Cottolengo Institution.

Mamma was worrying about her mother's belongings, and especially about her brother Pietro's mattresses, which she wanted to get for Giulio. She decided to go immediately to her brother Duilio to settle this matter with him. Giulio said to her, "I thought that when the person was admitted to Cottolengo, the institution was taking all their possessions as a token of their payment for their care."

"Yes, yes," replied his mother, "but we don't have to give them everything. We could leave them what we don't need. Nobody would check what we take." Giulio shook his head in a sign of disapproval. But his mother justified herself, "Most of the things belonged to my brother Pietro, they don't belong to my mother. We don't have to give his property to Cottolengo." And she left in a hurry.

When Mamma returned from her brother, she was furious and upset to the degree that Giulio initially couldn't make sense of what she was saying. She repeatedly shouted, "That scoundrel of my brother! That scoundrel!"

Giulio was trying to calm her down, "Mamma, sit down, don't get excited. Tell us what happened when you calm yourself."

But she couldn't stop and continued with outrage to complain, "Between him and his wife they already cleaned up my mother's place of all the best things my brother Pietro had!"

Then, gesticulating furiously with her hands she denounced her brother's action, "And my brother Pietro's mattresses! Those nice almost new mattresses my brother made from the good new wool just before the war started! They are already on Giuliana and Rita's couch! And listen to this, my brother Duilio had the impudence to say that his daughters' mattresses were too old and they needed badly new ones.

"I told him that my poor Giulio, who had just returned home from the prisoners of the war camps in Germany, does not have any mattress at all to put on the floor to sleep,

and he needed those mattresses more than his daughters who had slept on the old ones until now and nothing happen to them.

"Could you imagine what his answer was? He said that he, his wife, and his daughters took care of the Mother three times more than I did and, therefore, he had the right to have the first choice of what he wanted to take."

She took her breath, and then with indignation complained, "And he had the impertinence to tell me to go tomorrow in a hurry to my mother's apartment and take what I wanted before the Cottolengo's agents will come on Monday to take the rest of her belongings. But he warned me that I couldn't take my mother's mattresses, because he was advised that she needs them for her bed at Cottolengo."

Finally, Mamma sat on the chair, put her elbows on the table, put her palms on her forehead and began to cry. Giulio put his arm around her shoulders and said quietly, "Let them have those mattresses. They have more right to have them than I. They took care of Grandmother and I didn't."

Mamma was so exhausted from her emotional outburst that she didn't argue with Giulio's reasoning. She only said, "My brother did great injustice to me and to my sister, Elvira. Why he didn't call me to go together and divide justly and peacefully between him, my sister, and me what we could take?" She raised her voice, "No! He purposely didn't tell me anything and just grabbed what he wanted and left to us what he didn't want. I shall never forgive him for this. And I shall never talk to him or to his wife again for as long as I live. They are as good as dead for me!"

When Babbo and Domenico came home from work, Mamma had the renewed energy to repeat as forcefully as before the story about the mattresses.

Babbo told her, "What have you expected from your brother? He does everything that his wife tells him to do. And you know how shrewd she is. You are right not to talk to them any more."

Domenico took this episode very casually and didn't give much importance to it, limiting himself to a few calming words for his mother.

The next day, Sunday afternoon, the visit to cousin Mario was postponed until the next Sunday and Mamma went with Giulio to her mother's apartment; they returned with a bundle of bed linen and towels, a box with some dishes, and memorabilia of her brother Pietro. Mamma complained again that all the good things were taken by her brother Duilio and his wife. And she swore again, "I shall never talk to them as long as I live!"

Giulio wanted me to get out of the apartment to breathe some fresh air, and before supper we went for a half-hour walk in the neighborhood. As we leisurely strolled holding each other tightly arm-in-arm, Giulio tried to justify his mother's outburst and behavior. "You should understand that my mother never could buy things for the home as she would have wanted. My father's wages were sufficient only to feed and to clothe the four of us and to pay for the rent and utilities. She was very frugal and could afford to buy only the essential items, for which she had to save for very long time. For her a good mattress made from the new wool represents a precious possession. And her brother indeed behaved as a villain toward both of his sisters." I agreed that his mother was right to be upset.

# Filing Marriage Application

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

On Sunday evening Giulio wrote in Italian a translation of my birth certificate, because the original that was written in Russian was not acceptable as a document for the marriage license.

On Monday morning, October 22, the five of us, Derna, Signora Bacci, Domenico, Giulio, and I, took the streetcar to the City Hall. There were a lot of people waiting already to get into the Notary office and we had to stay for a long time in line.

There were many notices on the bulletin boards in the hall where we were standing and to pass the time Giulio went to read them. He returned all excited and told me that one notice was about the food subsidy provided by UNRRA<sup>1</sup> for the needy small children and for the pregnant women, and that it was distributed in Palazzo Reale.<sup>2</sup> "We shall go tomorrow and register you," said Giulio. "Mamma will be pleased to hear this news, because she is complaining that the rations with the food coupons are very small."

After our witnesses signed before Notary the Italian translation of my birth certificate, we had to go to another office where we had to wait in line again. There, we and our witnesses had to sign Declarations made by Giulio and me that we had never been married before.

Then in another office Giulio and I made an application for marriage; to it had to be attached another form that we had to fill in, a request for waiving the announcements and waiting period by reason of imminent birth of a child. The employee told Giulio, "After the war ended we have so many applications for marriage that there is a huge backlog. It is impossible to do it right away this week. You should come next Friday to find out the date of your marriage registration."

And Giulio replied with a joke, "Let's hope that the baby will not make a surprise and decides to arrive before that date!"

On our way to the streetcar stop Giulio and I expressed our gratitude to Derna, Signora Bacci, and Domenico for being so kind to come as our witnesses and to endure all the waiting standing on their feet; we stopped at the nearby café and Giulio treated all with a cup of coffee.

We came to the streetcar boarding area shortly after twelve o'clock when workers and employees were rushing home for lunch. At that time in Italy most people who didn't work in shifts had a two hours lunch break from twelve to two o'clock and most of them went home to eat with the family, rest, and then return to work until six o'clock in the evening. Therefore, we had to wait for our turn to get aboard the tightly packed car. Giulio paid for all the tickets but we had to stay on our feet and, as the passengers got off at their stops, we slowly moved toward the back exit.

We had almost reached the back landing of the car when I heard Giulio greet joyfully, "Signor Bagero! *Buon giorno!*"

A tall man standing in the back of the car looked at him with surprise and, as he recognized Giulio, his face illuminated with a happy smile and he responded warmly, "Signor Verro! *Buon giorno!* When have you returned home?"

Giulio made his way closer to Signor Bagero and I saw them shaking hands and

engaging in a lively conversation. I slowly made my way toward the back exit and reached them just before our streetcar was to make a stop on the corner of Corso Novara and Corso Palermo, where Signor Bargerò and we had to get off. We waved good-by to Derna, who was getting off on the next stop.

Giulio and Signor Bargerò helped Signora Bacci and me to get down the steps. Giulio introduced us to his teacher and friend and said to me that we were invited this Saturday for a visit in his home. I had the chance only to say *Grazie*, because Signor Bargerò saluted us and excused himself for leaving right away, because he had to rush home for lunch.

As we climbed the four flights of stairs of our apartment building, Giulio explained that Signor Bargerò was his former teacher of radio equipment and that he also had recommended him for the job at STIPEL Telephone Company.

"He must like you very much," commented Signora Bacci, "to invite you for a visit in his home."

"Yes," responded Giulio, "we respect each other very much."

When we reached the landing on our floor, we thanked Signora Bacci once more and she hurried into her apartment hoping that her husband hadn't arrived yet for lunch.

Babbo was already home eating his lunch and Giulio told him and Mamma what we had done that morning, about his encounter with Signor Bargerò, and the invitation to visit him. Both Babbo and Mamma were very pleased to hear the news.

Babbo commented, "I am glad that I send you to our company's lawyer; he had given you the right advice."

Mamma suggested, "It is good to keep contact with Signor Bargerò, you never know how he could help you in the future."

When Babbo was gone back to work and we were helping Mamma with the dishes, Giulio informed her about the food subsidy for me. He was right, she indeed became excited at this news and asked what kind of food they would give me.

"We don't know it yet," calmed her Giulio. "Tomorrow morning we shall go for registration and will find out what the Americans are giving away."

Before starting to mop the kitchen floor, Giulio told his mother, "This morning Lala was too long on her feet and her legs need some rest. Would you allow her to lie down for a while on the couch?" I saw Mamma looking at her son in disbelief that he dared to ask her for such exception from the strict rule.

"Giulio," she answered sternly, "you know well that it was always forbidden in our house to sit on the couch and you are asking to allow her to lie down."

Giulio put his arm around Mother's shoulders and said in a reconciliatory voice, "Mamma, before you never had the pregnant daughter-in-law living in your house." And without waiting for her consent, he told me to remove my shoes and to lie down on the couch to rest.

After the kitchen floor was dry, both he and Mamma sat on the chairs on the opposite sides of the couch and put their heads on their folded arms placed on the high couch sides. They rested for about half-an-hour and then went to visit Giulio's grandmother at the Cottolengo hospital.

I remained at home, and since the kitchen table was free and the pressing irons made of heavy cast iron were nice and hot on the cast iron stove top, I decided to use this time to iron some of my clothing that was wrinkled from remaining in the suitcase

for several weeks. I couldn't iron it all, because there was not much space in the wooden wardrobe to hang it. I would have liked to iron some of Giulio's shirts, but I didn't know where his mother was keeping them and she didn't allow me yet to iron them or any other items of Giulio's clothing. Either she didn't trust me to do a good job of ironing them, or she wanted to show her son that he still needed his mother.

When I mentioned this to Giulio, he told me, "Don't be so sensitive. I just came home after a long absence and she is mothering me a little. Besides, she did this for me before and it is natural for her to do it now. You will have plenty of time to do it for the rest of our life together."

The news about Giulio's grandmother's health was not good. She indeed had the broken hip and a stroke. She didn't recognize them and was moaning from the great pain of the hip fracture. In that condition and at her age doctors were not intending to operate and repair her bones. This meant that she had to stay in bed and wait to see if nature would heal it, a slim possibility. Anyway, she was accepted now in the Cotelengo Hospital and eventually should be transferred to the Charitable Department of that Institution as a *nullatenente*,<sup>3</sup> elderly, sick, and handicapped.

This was a relief for her daughter and son, who couldn't afford to take her to live with their families in their one-room-and-a-kitchen apartments when their mother was healthy. Now that she was seriously sick, this was completely out of the question.

At some point, as Giulio and his mother were discussing about Grandmother, she made a comment, "It was a destiny that resolved our problem of what to do with my mother. She was ordered by the authorities to leave her son's apartment at the former Fascist Club; and at Cottolengo they would have made her wait for a long time before admitting her if she was only elderly and not sick."

"Poor Nonna," replied Giulio with a deep sigh, "what a tragic solution to her problem..."

After supper Mamma and I, as usual, were mending socks and the conversation between Babbo, Mamma, and Giulio was dominated by the problem of her mother, Cottolengo, and the destiny of the poor elderly people in the city of Turin. Babbo talked about Cotelengo as a normal solution for the "poor old folks" and he cited the examples from his side of the family. "My mother finished her last days and died in Cotelengo. So did my aunt Margarita, who had lots of money during her life. But it was her misfortune that her children depleted all her savings; they all lived very well and had their own businesses, which they started with their mother's money and constantly borrowed more and more from her. When she became elderly and frail, they placed her in Cotelengo."

After a short pause Babbo looked at Giulio and, with the wise expression on his face, added, "You should not be sad about your grandmother being placed in Cotelengo. In her condition it is the best place to finish her days. It is well known that Cotelengo nuns are taking very good care of the sick and the elderly. And it is a tradition here in Turin that all famous Professors<sup>4</sup> and good doctors volunteer regularly to serve the poor in Cotelengo Hospital. You should be glad that she is there. Neither your mother nor her brother could provide her with such care. They don't have the money to pay for the doctors and medicines and don't have the place to keep her in these small apartments."

"Maybe you are right Babbo," agreed Giulio. "But it is so sad to see her there alone among the strangers."

And Babbo wisely concluded, "One day, probably, all of us will finish in that institution. Those are the facts of life for the poor folks like us. We cannot afford even to dream to be placed in the expensive institutions where the rich place their elderly."

Babbo reflected for a while, smiled and, triumphantly, with obvious conviction, presented a possible solution to this problem in the future, "Giulio, vote for the Communist Party in the coming elections. When we, the Communists, will have the power to govern, we would give equal rights for all the elderly and sick to be in good institutions, like they have it in the Soviet Union."

"Oh, Babbo," replied Giulio with the touch of weariness in his voice, "you take every occasion to try to convince me to vote for the Communists. What do you know about how the sick and the elderly are taken care in the Soviet Union?"

"I read about it in the '*Unita*,'" answered Babbo raising his voice, "and I saw also the pictures showing how the old folks are provided there!"

"Do you believe everything that is written in the '*Unita*'?" Giulio asked with irony in his voice.

"Why should they lie about it?!" asked Babbo angrily.

Mamma felt that father and son were on the brink of a political collision and interrupted their discussion by saying calmly, "Giulio, it's becoming cold in the kitchen. Go and look and put a piece of wood the stove before the flame extinguishes itself."

Giulio got her message that it was time to stop the discussion with his father. He got up and busied himself reviving the fire in the stove. And he didn't answer his father's question, therefore terminating the discussion.

Later that evening when his parents went to bed, Giulio told me, "During those years that I lived far from home, I forgot that it is useless to argue with my father when he believes that he is right." And he asked me, "Did I ever tell you the story about my father's insisting that the moon is bigger than the sun?"

"Yes, I remember it. You told me when we were in Laband."

"I could never forget that incident," continued Giulio. "It was for the first time that I had the proof that I was right. I realized then that I could not trust any more opinions of my father."

"I don't understand much when you are discussing with your father," I remarked. "But I can hear that he speaks to you with much authority about politics."

"It is hard for me now to agree with him as I did before when I was living at home. He cannot accept that I have my own opinion about politics. Well, my mother is always there to stop us from going too far in our discussions."

"Yes," I agreed, "she knows well her husband and his character."

"Now, you go to bed," said Giulio, "because tomorrow morning I will wake you up early. Remember, we need to register you for food subsidy."

On Tuesday, October 23, early in the morning, Giulio and I took the streetcar to Palazzo Reale where registration for the food subsidy from UNRRA was held. We thought that we would be among the first to arrive there, but we were wrong. There were already so many people in line that Giulio almost decided to give up and not wait. But I convinced him that it was better to wait and to register now than to do it after the baby was born, when we would need this food. But he was right, that day our turn didn't come before they closed the registration office.

Therefore, on Wednesday we went even earlier and stayed in line until they finally

registered me early in the afternoon.

They didn't ask for any documents, only my name, address, and when we expected the baby to be born. I received an UNRRA card and was directed to the distribution place, where they gave me one package each of dry milk and sugar and I was told to come there once a week to receive free food.

Of course, Mamma was very impressed with the sugar, but was somewhat suspicious about the dry milk. However, Giulio and I diluted it to the right proportion and with some reluctance she agreed that it was drinkable. Even Babbo, who never did drink milk because he felt it didn't mix well in his stomach with the wine, tasted it and said, "It is consumable." And pointing at me added authoritatively, "It shall help her to make mother's milk for the baby."

However, Babbo didn't lose the opportunity to criticize the Americans, "Those American capitalists are trying to bribe the poor people with the free food as propaganda to make them vote for the King and for *Partito Democristiano*.<sup>5</sup>

Giulio couldn't stop himself from asking his father, "Why the Soviet Union does not send here some food, instead of financing communist propaganda?"

This time Babbo answered without anger, "What a stupid question! Because they don't have anything to eat themselves. The Germans have destroyed their fields." Giulio dropped the argument. This time he felt that maybe his father was not completely wrong.

On Thursday we went for another visit to the doctor, who confirmed that everything was going well and that we didn't need to see him any more, but that in about two-and-half weeks, when I felt the first childbirth pains, Giulio should immediately bring me to the hospital. As we left the doctor's office Giulio said, "I hope we could make on time with our marriage registration before the baby arrives. Tomorrow I shall go again in the Town Hall to find out when they have scheduled our marriage registration appointment."

On Friday, the clerk in the Town Hall told Giulio that our application for marriage was reviewed and all our papers were in order and that the registration was scheduled on November 6 in the morning. Giulio was very worried, "Could you make it to wait that long?" he asked me. Then he added with consolation, "Well, at least we have now a definite date. We should notify Derna, Signora Bacci, and Domenico to be available on that date."

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1. UNRRA - acronym for United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

2. Royal Palace [in Italian].

3. Person without property.

4. A title of a Chief Medical Doctor in the Italian hospitals.

5. The Christian Democrats Party.

## A Visit To Signor Bargerò

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

On Saturday, October 27, in the afternoon we went to visit Signor Bargerò. He lived at the Barriera di Milano, on one of the streets crossing Corso Novara beyond Corso Palermo, in the direction of the Mount of Superga<sup>1</sup> and the hills on the outskirts of Turin. They lived in a better neighborhood that dated to the early nineteen hundreds. The apartment houses there were built for the upper class, but that had changed to mostly middle class families that could afford the rents. The three-story buildings had a distinct and somewhat ornate architectural style, large windows, balconies, and separate entrances for each staircase. Bargerò's lived on the second floor. As we climbed the stairs I noticed that the hall and the staircase were neat and clean.

Signora and Signor Bargerò and their teenage daughter Elsa greeted us warmly, almost as we were their relatives. Signor Bargerò introduced us to his wife and daughter. I was impressed that even though he had been Giulio's teacher, he didn't call him by his first name, but introduced us and spoke to us as Signor Verro and Signora Verro. Signora Bargerò asked us to remove our coats and Elsa put them on a coat rack in the entrance hall.

Signora invited us into a very large living room. I was immediately impressed with what I saw. Compared to furnishings of Giulio's relatives, Bargeròs had better quality furniture. On one end of the room was an upholstered sofa and chairs with a nearby table lamp for reading. Opposite that was a dining table, several chairs, and a buffet; wooden furniture had carved ornamentation enhanced by light sheen. Especially, I noticed that they had area rugs on the floor.

On the other end of the room there was a large bookcase full of books displaying colorful book covers. Nearby was a small desk with a desk lamp; several books and a few piles of papers indicated that it was used recently. Lace curtains and draperies adorned the two large windows where several live plants enjoyed sunlight. A modest size chandelier and the pictures on the walls added to the comfortable but unpretentious lived-in atmosphere. But compared to the apartments of Giulio's relatives that I had visited, it looked luxurious to me.

Signora Bargerò invited us to sit down on the sofa and they accommodated around us on the comfortable upholstered chairs.

"Tell us what is going on in Europe after the war," Signor Bargerò asked immediately.

"And how you lived in Germany during the war," seconded his wife. And Elsa was interested to know how Giulio and I met.

Fortunately, both husband and wife spoke some French and Signora used to be a German teacher when they lived for several years in Switzerland. This kept me actively involved in the conversation that spontaneously switched back and forth from Italian to French and sometimes to German.

Their daughter Elsa, who was studying in the Scientific Lyceum, as it was called, the secondary school with science curriculum, was a very smart young girl and had many questions of her own about the war, postwar situation in Europe, and about life in the Soviet Union. The whole family was definitely not sympathetic to the communist ideology and I felt comfortable to express my true feelings about the Soviet regime and the latest experiences with the Soviets during their occupation of Poland.

I was so much involved in conversation and the exchange of ideas with our hosts that I felt an immediate intellectual affinity with the three of them.

During that visit I didn't have a chance to observe much their physical appearance. The only thing I noticed at that time was that Signor Bargerò was tall and well-built, and, compared to him, his wife was short and smaller in size, while their teenage daughter was much taller than her mother and already well-built as her father.

After a while Signora Bargerò said, "We are so busy talking that I forgot to make a coffee." She got up and went in the kitchen while Elsa put the tablecloth on the table and invited us to sit around it. As in all other places where we were offered the chicory coffee, here it was also served without sugar, but Signora prepared homemade cookies as refreshments. As we were sipping coffee, our hosts had more and more questions and we couldn't answer them all by the time it was beginning to become dark outside and we had to go home because it was suppertime.

Signora Bargerò concluded, "It is impossible in one afternoon to recount to us all that we are curious to know. You should come and visit us again very soon."

"I don't know how soon we could come," answered Giulio. "As you can see, my wife should be soon going to the hospital. We are expecting a baby in about a couple of weeks."

Signora asked me if we already had a crib for the baby, and when I told her that we didn't have it yet, she offered to lend us Elsa's child's bed with the mattress, and she led us to the storage room to show it to us. It was a beautiful bed with sides that could be lowered and the child could sleep in it up to three, or even four years of age. We were so happy that we didn't have the words to express our gratitude for her offer. Giulio told her that he would come next Saturday with his brother so they could carry it together to our apartment.

As we were saluting them and thanking them for their hospitality, both Signora and Signor Bargerò said that they enjoyed our company and were grateful for such an interesting afternoon. They sincerely invited us to visit them again; and we promised them to come after the baby was born.

On our way home I said to Giulio, "What a wonderful family the Bargerò's are! I hope we could really visit them again."

"Of course, we shall visit them!" answered Giulio. "We promised it."

It became dark quickly and the streets were not well lit, being still on a war-restricted illumination. We were walking fast arm-in-arm and Giulio was holding me tight to be sure that in my condition I walked safely.

When we came home, Mamma was already setting the table. She greeted us with a humorous phrase, "I thought that they invited you to stay for a supper. What did you do there all afternoon?"

"We had a wonderful time, Mamma," said Giulio. "They are such a nice family. And they invited us to come again."

"That's good," she nodded her head with approval, "I told you that you should keep in touch with Signor Bargerò. He has connections. You never know, but he may be useful one day."

"They helped us already, Mamma," replied Giulio. "They are lending us for our baby their daughter's child bed with the mattress. I think that it shall fit right next to your bed on the side where Lala is sleeping."

"It is wonderful!" she exclaimed.

And we all went in the bedroom to see if there was enough room to put it there.

When we returned to the kitchen, she told us, "While you were out, I went to visit my mother at Cotelengo and she is not improving; in fact, she was much worse than the last week. She didn't recognize me and couldn't talk. I am afraid that she would not live long. But the nuns are taking good care of her. She was clean and even her hair was combed."

"Yes," agreed Giulio, "that is bad news about Grandmother's health. I am sorry, Mamma, but at this point there is nothing that could be done to heal her."

At that moment Domenico arrived and Mamma commented, "Look who is here! Are you staying after supper, just for change? Where have you been the whole afternoon?" And without waiting for his answer continued, "Grandmother's health is very bad. You should have been visiting her with me, instead of wasting your time with 'that girl' whom you cannot marry!"

"Mamma, don't start it again, maligning her," answered Domenico calmly but sternly.

Giulio right away began telling his brother about our visit to the Bagero family and kept the situation from developing into a quarrel. But both Mamma and Domenico remained tense through suppertime. To escape an unpleasant evening Domenico went out immediately after supper.

"You see, you see, he went out again!" complained Mamma to Giulio.

"Mamma," answered gently Giulio, "you should not be nagging him all the time. He is not a child any more. Let him live his own life. He is young and needs company."

"Your mother still believes that, if she nags him, he would go back to his wife," commented Babbo. "I gave up long time ago about this matter. He married her only because she insisted on it. Domenico wanted only to recognize that the child was his. But your mother insisted that he marry Bianca. Now she has to get used to the results of pushing him into a marriage."

Later, when his parents went to bed Giulio explained to me in French why they had this heated discussion, "My mother is very persistent and it's very hard for her to recognize that Domenico's marriage was a mistake right from the start. Domenico told me that Mamma was partially responsible that his marriage failed. After he was married, she constantly criticized Bianca for being a vain and spoiled girl; said she was not able of doing anything at home and that her mother did everything for her; that she was not able to clean the house, cook, sew, or mend. Bianca was very young, only sixteen-years-old, but my mother expected her to be an experienced housewife to satisfy her ambition to have a 'good wife' for her son." Giulio gestured with his hands, indicating that there was nothing to do about it now.

After a short pause Giulio added, "But Domenico said that Bianca was also responsible for the failure of their marriage. She liked expensive things and constantly reproached him for not being able to provide for all her whims, until he couldn't stand it anymore. He said 'It began from the moment we exited the church after our wedding when she called me *balengo*<sup>2</sup> for not providing a carriage to bring us home from the church, which was only a block from the house!'"

Giulio looked at me and said, "That's why I want you to try to show my mother that you will be a good wife for me, so she could not find anything to criticize you."

"I am trying, Giulio," I replied, "but she is watching everything I do and corrects me if she doesn't like how I am doing it. It is hard to hear it the whole day for all kind of

small really unimportant things.”

“It’s all right, be patient with her, so she will see that you are trying to make things her way. She means no harm, that’s her Tuscan<sup>3</sup> stubborn character. You will get used to it.”

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1. The name of the highest hill on the outskirts of Turin.

2. Stupid - in Piedmontaise dialect.

3. From the region of Tuscany in the central Italy.

## Giulio’s Cousin Mario Cortopassi

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

It was time to make a visit to Giulio’s cousin Mario Cortopassi<sup>1</sup> to ask him if he would accept to be a godfather for our child. On Sunday afternoon, October 28, the three of us, Mamma, Giulio and I, went to visit him. He lived far from us and we had to take one streetcar and then walk to another street and to wait there to take another one. I said, “No wonder we didn’t visit him right away, as we did with your other relatives.”

During our long journey there Giulio told me a little about his cousin. Mario Cortopassi was Mamma’s first cousin as were his brother Oberto, his wife Derna, and another cousin Dina whom we met before. Mario was smarter than his brother. They both worked at the same factory of Villar Perosa. But, while his brother remained only a machine operator, Mario quickly became a shift supervisor. This gave him a better pay and a superior rank at the factory.

According to what Mamma recounted, Mario’s and Oberto’s father, Amerigo Cortopassi<sup>2</sup> immigrated to the United States in the first decade of the 1900’s, while his wife, Fiora Franchini<sup>3</sup> Cortopassi, the sister of Giulio’s grandfather Giuseppe Franchini,<sup>4</sup> remained in Asciano raising two sons. With the money her husband sent her she purchased in a village a small wine shop and earned her living and raised her two sons. Mario’s father had not come back from America but his mother joined him in Chicago after her two sons got married.

On the advice of his mother, Mario married Iris Bertini,<sup>5</sup> whose father had some property in the village and had only two daughters who could inherit it. Iris was a good-looking young woman, but she was considered to be somewhat irresponsible in her behavior. Mario’s mother believed that this trait would be corrected under the guidance of her son, while he eventually would inherit her property. Iris’ father was more than happy to place his daughter in the hands of Mario and he also hoped that her husband would straighten her out. Therefore, both parents were satisfied with this marriage. Mario and Iris had a daughter Fiorina.

But soon after they moved to Turin, Mario found out that Iris didn’t improve her behavior after marriage, that she was indeed an irresponsible wife and mother. He couldn’t tolerate her behavior and sent her back to her father in the village but kept his

daughter Fiorina. His sister-in-law Derna, who didn't have children of her own and who was the girl's godmother, took care of her from that time on until now.

Mario couldn't remarry because at that time in Italy law did not allow divorce; and under the strong influence of the Catholic dogma the law continued after WW II. According to what Mamma told Giulio, Mario had recently found a companion, a very nice woman, Maria, a former military nurse. More recently she had worked at the Villar Perosa factory dispensary, where Mario met her. Mario and Maria lived together, maybe in sin, according to the custom and Catholic Church rules, but at least he had a woman to share his life, especially now with his daughter becoming of age and beginning to look for a husband.

As we walked from the streetcar stop, I saw that Mario lived in a nice, newer white-collar class neighborhood. Giulio told me that these multi-story apartment houses were built during the Mussolini period. The facades of the buildings were plain, but there were separate entrances to the staircases and they were kept neat and clean.

Mario and Maria were expecting us, but it didn't diminish the joy on Mario's face when he saw Giulio. They embraced warmly and only then did Mario present Maria to us as his companion, and Giulio presented to them me as his wife. Mamma and Maria already knew each other.

I noticed that although these apartments were built in more recent times, they were economy construction. All rooms were smaller than in older buildings; however, the apartments had a small bathroom, an entrance hall, two bedrooms and the kitchen. As with others of Giulio's relatives that we visited, we were invited into the kitchen, the center of family life. And, as a symbol of hospitality, Maria, of course, offered us the chicory coffee without sugar. Those were the hard times immediately after the war and no one was ashamed of not serving sugar with the coffee.

Mario's brother Oberto, who worked at the same factory, had already informed him that Giulio returned from Germany married to a Russian girl, and therefore they didn't expect me to talk Italian, except for a few conventional phrases in saluting, thanking, and saying that something was good or pleasing. But by this time I had already learned many words and expressions in Italian and was myself surprised how much I understood the conversations that were going on between Mamma and Maria and between Giulio and Mario.

As usual, not being involved directly in conversation, I had plenty of time to observe. Mario was older than his brother Oberto, but he was shorter and smaller overall in size. He did not resemble his brother's behavior either. While Oberto was loud, Mario was soft-spoken and had more refined manners.

Maria was taller and more slender than Mario. I think that she was about his age. As a nurse she was obviously used to professional contact with people and it did show in how she behaved with us, tactfully, but dignified in voice and demeanor. She asked Mamma how soon I expected the baby and reassured me, speaking as a nurse in a doctor's office—that in Italy hospitals and midwives were very good and I could expect good care of my baby and me.

On that occasion Mamma reminded her son, "Giulio, don't forget what Derna suggested you to ask Mario about."

"What she suggested?" asked Mario with curiosity.

Giulio got up, came close to me and replied to Mario, "Well, Derna agreed to be a

godmother to our baby and she suggested asking you to be a godfather. Do you think that you can do a favor and accept such a responsibility?"

Mario looked at Maria, as if he was asking her opinion. She smiled and nodded almost imperceptibly. Mario then replied, "I am honored by your request. Of course, I accept it."

I understood what was said and replied in Italian, "*Grazie, Mario.*"

Giulio also expressed his gratitude. Mamma was all smiles, she liked it that Mario accepted Giulio's request.

Then Mamma got engaged with Maria talking about her mother being sick and asking her professional opinion. I was amazed with what patience Maria was explaining to her something about the stroke and also about the broken hip.

Mario, of course, was asking Giulio about his life in the prisoners of war camp in Germany; the situation in Europe after the war; and they discussed the political future of Italy. From the fragments that I was able to understand in their conversation, I concluded that Mario didn't have communist ideas and was leaning to vote for the Christian Democrats Party, and he preferred to vote for Italy to become a Democratic Republic with the elected president, rather than to remain the Kingdom of Italy and having a King. I understood that Giulio was in agreement with Mario in political views and that he leaned in that direction to vote, rather than on his father's and brother's side.

As we were saying good-bye to our hosts, Mario reminded us, "You would let me know when the baby will be born." Giulio reassured him that he will notify Derna and his brother Oberto will tell him at work. We departed from their home very happy with our visit. Mamma especially was satisfied that her grandchild should have a nice godfather who could also afford to make good gifts.

On Monday Giulio and I went to the Palazzo Reale to receive the free food from UNRRA. Because he was starting his work at the STIPEL the next week on Thursday, I would have to go there all by myself, so Giulio was teaching me how to watch for the right streetcar stop and how to get from it to Palazzo Reale. We had to wait in line for some time, but it was not as long as when we had to register.

When we returned home, Mamma already finished washing clothes and was hanging them on the wire lines extending from the balcony in front of the apartment.

During the two weeks we lived with Giulio's parents I got used to the daily family routine. Each day was a virtual repetition of the previous day, though with small variations on some days of the week, such as Monday was a washday, and Tuesday was ironing and mending day. This predictability of what had to be done every day and each part of the day made it easy to adapt to the routine, but it didn't leave me time to do things for myself. I had to ask Giulio to explain to Mamma that sometimes, instead of mending in the evening, I wanted to write a letter to my mother. And, if I felt tired, I didn't dare to go to bed early, because I felt not at ease to ask her to get the bed ready for me, the task she did nightly before she and Babbo retired.

In the evening when Giulio and I were alone in the kitchen, we constantly talked about when we could have a place of our own. Slowly it was becoming clear that the idea of finding an apartment for us in the near future was impossible.

There were several negative factors to consider. First, after the war there was a shortage of apartments in the city and it was almost impossible to find even an attic room to rent. Second, assuming that we found one, we didn't have the money to buy

even a mattress to put on the floor to sleep. And third, the baby needed a warm place during the winter and wood was very expensive and hard to find. We had to resign ourselves to remain living with Giulio's parents at least until spring. But the biggest problem was that we wouldn't save any money because Giulio had decided he would give all his wages to his mother as he always had. And I couldn't even complain about it.

Giulio consoled me, "My dearest Lala, the important thing is that we are together." And on this point I agreed.

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1. The "Franchini's Family Tree," Foglio No.6.
  2. Ibid, Foglio No. 6.
  3. Ibid, Foglios No. 1 and No. 6.
  4. See the chapter "Giulio's Ancestors Lived In the Village Of Asciano."
  5. The "Franchini's Family Tree," Foglio No. 2, Bertini's ancestors.

## Marriage Registration

By Olga Gladky Verro

Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro

On Thursday, November 1, 1945, Giulio started his work at the STIPEL telephone company. He woke me up before leaving for work and reminded me to try helping Mamma in her daily chores without being upset when she teaches me her way of doing things. I wished him good luck on the job. He came home for lunch at noon, at the same time as Babbo, and they returned back to be at work by two o'clock.

In the beginning Giulio was assigned to work with another worker to install the new telephones in the homes at the designated section of the city. They had to take the streetcar to the nearest streetcar stop and to walk from there to the residences where they were scheduled to work that day. Sometimes it took long time to reach them and they were able to serve only two to three new customers a day. Giulio said that the hardest thing was to carry his heavy tool bag, but the job was not difficult and he enjoyed meeting people. Giulio said that most important for him was to feel secure that he could provide for us and not be a financial burden to his parents.

On Saturday, November 3, he worked only a half day and when he returned home he proudly handed to his mother an envelope with his first earned wages and said, "Mamma, here are my wages for the half-week that I worked." Then, almost apologetically, he corrected, "I kept part of the money for the streetcar tickets for myself and for everybody who will be coming next Tuesday to the Town Hall for our marriage registration and for the registration excise tax."

As Mamma was counting the money, Giulio added reassuringly, "Next Saturday it will be more money, because I will have the wages for the whole week, less one day on Tuesday that I asked to have off for our marriage registration."

On Sunday afternoon Giulio, Domenico, and Mamma went to visit Grandmother at Cotelengo. Babbo was working, and I remained alone in the apartment and again used

this time to wash my hair and to bathe in the small tub. This was much better than doing it in the evening when I had to hurry between the time Mamma and Babbo went to bed and before Domenico arrived home. This time I didn't have to rush and enjoyed a relaxed bath.

By the time they returned home, I was already writing a letter to my mother. I wanted to mail another letter, because I was not sure that the international mail was going regularly yet, and was hoping that maybe one of the letters would get to its destination. I also suspected that the Soviets had established censorship and this could retard the arrival of the letters. Giulio's mother couldn't understand why I was writing another letter to my mother, when I hadn't received an answer to the one I had already mailed.

Giulio told me that his grandmother was not improving; in fact, her health was worsening, because her hip was not healing and she could not be lifted to the sitting position. She was not able to feed herself and the nuns had to feed her. It was becoming clear that she would die very soon. Mamma was anxious about the cost of the funeral and who would pay for it, since the institution had taken all of her mother's possessions. She asked the nuns about it and was informed that Cottolengo makes all the arrangements and pays the expenses for the funeral of the poor in their care. This meant that Mamma, her sister, and her brother would not bear the burden of paying for the funeral.

Mamma said with relief, "In this sad incident with my mother, the only right thing my brother did was placing her in Cotelengo. Could you imagine if we had to take care of it all?"

Monday was a washday and Mamma did the washing. She allowed me only to hang the clothes on the wires off the balcony and I helped her in preparing lunch and set the table. By this time I was able to understand most of the common words and sentences used in the daily routine and had no difficulty in following what she wanted me to do.

It was a pleasant break to the daily routine from twelve to two o'clock when Giulio was coming home for lunch and I could see him and talk with him. He always inquired what new words I learned that day and showed his appreciation of my quick learning of Italian.

Monday evening Giulio arranged with Signora Bacci and Derna the time to take the streetcar; and Domenico said that he would come from work directly to the Town Hall.

Tuesday, November 6, 1945 was a special day for Giulio and me. He woke me up early in the morning to get ready and said, "Dearest Lala, finally we reached the day that we would become legally married. How long we searched for it!"

"And the baby has given us time to do it," I added.

And Giulio had expressed his wish, "Let's hope that he will be patient for a few more hours until we sign the certificate of marriage." Then he cautiously asked, "Are you feeling well this morning?"

"Perfect," I replied. "You don't have to worry, it will not happen today."

I put my best dress, combed my freshly washed hair that I set the night before, put on my coat and hat; Giulio also wore his best suit and coat, and Mamma her Sunday outfit.

We met Signora Bacci at the landing near her apartment, and Derna was waiting for us on the streetcar stop near our house. We all boarded the streetcar. At the Town Hall's waiting room Domenico was already waiting for us with a small bouquet of flowers, which he presented to me with a ceremonious gesture and said, "These flowers are for the bride." It was a really nice gesture on his part, which even Giulio hadn't expected from his brother.

The ceremony was very simple. The employee called Giulio's and my names and we all entered the office. He checked our identity cards. Then he told the three witnesses to come to the desk and asked us if we were entering in this matrimonial contract voluntarily. We answered, "Yes." Then he asked us to sign the Certificate of Marriage, and the witnesses to sign underneath. Giulio paid the excise tax and the employee placed the seal and signed the certificate. As he was giving us our Certificate Of Marriage, he congratulated us. Giulio kissed me and all our witnesses kissed us, congratulated, and wished us good luck.

Only then did we see Babbo, who came while we were busy with the paperwork. Babbo also congratulated us and then invited all of us to a café where he offered to all a glass of Vermouth wine to celebrate the event. Giulio and I expressed our appreciation to the witnesses for their favor of taking time to come this morning and we also thanked Babbo for the treat at the café. Everybody was in a good and happy mood as we boarded the streetcar where we chatted cheerfully until we reached our destination.

We saluted Derna before getting out at our stop and promised to let her know as soon as the baby was born. We said good-bye to Signora Bacci at the stairs landing and thanked her again for her kindness. We quickly set the table while Mamma warmed up the simple lunch without anything special, but for change, she didn't annoy Domenico with her preaching. And the happy mood prevailed through the whole lunchtime. This completed our marriage ceremony.

Domenico and Babbo returned to work, but Giulio remained home for the rest of the day, and after helping Mamma with the usual chores, the three of us took a rest.

In the afternoon both Giulio and I wrote letters to my mother describing in French our simple civil marriage ceremony. Giulio concluded his letter<sup>1</sup> to her with reassurance, "Dear *Maman*, now that we are legally married, you should not worry any more about Lala's and baby's future. According to the Italian law, beginning today, Lala became an Italian citizen. This means that she shall have all the rights and protections under the Italian laws. I hope that now you may be reassured that she is safe from 'our cousins'<sup>2</sup> and they cannot order her anymore to return 'home.'"

After reading this paragraph, I said to Giulio, "You stated it so clear and cleverly that, if 'our cousins' are censuring the mail, they would never suspect anything."

"Let's just hope," he replied, "that this letter will reach Mama and give her piece of mind. Until now we don't have any answer from her and we already mailed several letters. Probably, the Soviets do not allow yet the international mail to Poland from the countries that are not under Soviet occupation."

"Maybe," I also guessed, "we are writing to the Rufin's address and it is very possible that for some reason she is not living there."

"It's possible," replied Giulio, "but she knows we write to his address, therefore she should go there to get her letters."

I thought about the worst scenario, and said, "Maybe she didn't move on time to

Rufin's home and the NKVD caught her and deported her back home."

"Don't start with your pessimistic ideas," Giulio warned. "In any case, Rufin should write to us what he knows about your mother."

Our animated discussion in French annoyed Mamma. I had seen on other occasions that when Giulio and I spoke French, she was very uncomfortable because she couldn't understand what we were talking about. This time she looked at us with suspicion, as if we were conspirators talking about something we didn't want her to know. Finally, she couldn't resist longer and reproached her son, "Giulio, why are you talking in that foreign language? Talk with her in Italian, otherwise she will never learn it."

"Don't worry Mamma," Giulio replied reassuringly, "she will learn to speak Italian in no time at all."

Mamma made a grimace shaking her head to express her discontent.

"Giulio," I said, "she wants to know what we are talking about. Make a short translation for her and you will see that it will calm her down."

Giulio agreed and explained to her, "Mamma, we are trying to guess why we are not receiving letters from Lala's mother. It is easier for us to understand each other if we speak French, because Lala doesn't know yet all the words in Italian."

With relief she answered, "Why didn't you tell me this right away? I heard that Lala was complaining and both of you said 'mamma' so many times. I thought that she was making fuss about something that I had done."

"No, Mamma, we were talking about Lala's mother," explained Giulio. "Yes, she was complaining, but not about you, it was about the international mail that doesn't work yet well."

"Isn't she very suspicious?" I asked Giulio.

"Well," he justified her, "she understood one word and imagined the rest."

The remaining days of the week went by in the established routine. The three men went to work; I helped Mamma to put the apartment in order, and we went to the market and to the shops to buy vegetables, fruits, bread, and wine. I helped her to prepare the meals, and Giulio and Babbo came home for lunch.

After they were gone, we cleaned the kitchen, washed the floor, and Mamma rested while I quietly did some minor chores. I made sheets for the baby's bed from the big sheets I brought from Poland. I also prepared a small bag with baby clothes and my nightgown, robe, and personal items to have it ready to go to the hospital.

In the afternoon there was always something to iron for the men or for us. Then it was time to prepare the evening meal and set the table before the men returned from work. The supper and the evening were also the same every day; however, Giulio was pitching in helping to clear the table. Babbo, as usual, discussed authoritatively with Giulio about politics. And Domenico was going out and returning late in the evening, giving to Giulio and me some time to remain alone after parents went to bed.

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1. Giulio's letter to his mother-in-law, Antonina G Berezhnaya Gladky, November 6, 1945.

2. Before departing from Poland we agreed to call the Soviets "our cousins" in our letters.

## Birth of Our Daughter Lia

**By Olga Gladky Verro**  
**Also as Remembered by Giulio Verro**

We were in the process of revising the name that we should give to our baby. We had long time agreed to the name Lia, if it was a girl. For a boy's name we had a conflict. Giulio wanted the name Alfio, and that sounded harmonious to me. But after he told me the story of Alfio from the opera "Cavalleria Rusticana," I absolutely refused to give my son this name. Thus until the last moment we had not decided on a name for a boy. However, we did contemplate two names, Piero and Renzo, to be chosen at the last moment.

On Sunday, November 11, Mamma and Giulio went again to visit his grandmother and I took a bath in their absence.

Before supper I felt the first cramps of labor and Giulio decided to take me immediately to the hospital, since we needed to take the streetcar on Corso Novara and then transfer to another. It took us about one hour to reach the Mulinette<sup>1</sup> hospital. As we traveled, the cramps were increasing in intensity and I had a hard time to keep myself from complaining. I was lucky to find a place to sit in the streetcar and Giulio was standing in front of me and holding tight my hand.

In the hospital I was admitted right away in the maternity ward and Giulio warned the nurse that I didn't speak or understand Italian well. Giulio had only time to say good-bye, give me a quick kiss, and to say he would come by to check on me early in the morning before going to work.

The nurse led me to a small room, where another young woman was in the beginning stages of labor. The midwife came and asked me a few questions and checked on the position of the baby. When she found out that I couldn't speak and understand Italian well, she was annoyed and didn't bother even to try to explain to me how to behave during the labor spasms that were very painful.

When she was gone from the room, my roommate said, "This midwife is not very friendly. I guess she is busy and has no time to fuss with you. Is this your first pregnancy?"

"Yes, my first," I replied.

"This is my second child and I know already what to do and how to behave to resist the pain. I will teach you what to do to make it easier on you." And she showed me how she was alleviating her pain and I followed her advice and it really helped.

Up to midnight the two of us were competing in moaning and screaming. The midwife was checking on us at intervals and then ordered my roommate to move to the delivery room. Before leaving, my roommate wished me good luck.

My labor pains were becoming stronger and stronger and more frequent until the next morning when Giulio came to see me and found me all exhausted and in great pain. He was surprised that I was still waiting my turn.

"She is not ready to deliver yet," said the midwife, and reassured him, "Maybe later this morning."

Giulio promised to return during his lunchtime to see me.

Shortly before nine o'clock, the midwife ordered the aides to take me to the delivery room. The labor spasms were now frequent, very painful, and I struggled trying not to scream too loudly. The natural struggle of childbirth was complicated further

because I couldn't follow the commands given to me by the midwife, who was treating me harshly because I did not understand Italian. She didn't bother to communicate in some other way; I just remembered what my roommate showed me to do, how to push and relax and in the long run it helped.

Finally! I heard the midwife announcing, "It's a girl." And I heard the baby crying.

I suddenly felt so happy that I wanted to announce proudly to the whole world, "I am the Mother of a little girl!"

One of the nurses assisting the midwife brought the baby close to my face and said, "Here she is, your daughter, Signora Verro."

I carefully touched her tiny fingers and said, "Ciao, Lia."

"Are you naming her Lia?" asked the nurse. "I need to write the baby's name."

I answered, "Yes, Lia Verro."

The nurse immediately took the baby away and I saw that she was taking care of her. Meanwhile the midwife and another nurse were finishing with my afterbirth procedure and then moved me to another room where a young doctor came to put a few stitches in a laceration that occurred in delivery.

Then the nurses' aides moved me into a huge room with many large windows. There were several long rows of beds occupied by women who had already delivered. They gave me a large cup of milk with chicory coffee and the nurse aide told me to drink it all, "You need it to make the milk for the baby." I was so exhausted, from the long night of labor pains, and from delivery that morning that I fell asleep immediately.

I woke up when Giulio kissed me on the cheek and I heard him say, "Lala, are you asleep?" I opened my eyes and smiled. "So, we have a little daughter Lia," he said, caressing my face.

The nurse brought the baby, put her on my bed and said, "I will return and help you to get started breastfeeding her."

I had only time to kiss the baby, when Giulio took Lia in his arms and kissed her tenderly on the cheek.

"Aren't you disappointed that it is not Alfio?" I asked. "How could I be disappointed?" he answered, "Didn't you see how pretty she is?" Then he added, "We have plenty of time to have Alfio later."

We admired together Lia's little hands and fingers and her tiny mouth and rosy cheeks and guessed whom she resembled most. "She looks like your mother," concluded Giulio. I was not so sure, but she looked very pretty to me.

The nurse came and helped me start nursing. I was surprised that as soon as I touched with my nipple near her mouth, she immediately began to suck. "Oh," said Giulio, "look at her, she is already hungry. *Buon appetito*, my little girl!"

Mamma came to visit me in the afternoon. She saw the baby in the nursery. She said, "I am happy to have another grand- daughter. They are prettier than boys." She asked me if Giulio had already come to see me and if he was happy with his daughter. And she was curious what they gave me to eat. With my limited Italian we could not have a long conversation, so her visit was short.

After childbirth, women were kept in bed for the first two days and the nurses brought babies to their mothers for nursing. I was so happy that I had milk and Lia began to suck right away. Not until the third day would they allow me to sit on a chair, and to walk a little.

Giulio visited me every day during his lunchtime and was always there when the nurses brought babies for nursing. He treated our little daughter and me with such tenderness and affection that I knew he was happy. Every day he brought me oranges or mandarins to supplement my hospital diet. We admired our little daughter, who was slowly falling asleep as she was sucking my milk.

I stayed in the hospital until the next Sunday, when Giulio and Mamma came to take the baby and me home. I wanted to hold the baby, but Mamma took her from me saying that I was not strong enough to carry her walking to the streetcar. I knew that she meant well. But, when we boarded the streetcar and I found a place to sit down, she continued to hold the baby, and I felt almost jealous when she was proudly showing the baby to other passengers, as if she were her mother.

When we arrived at our streetcar stop, Giulio took Lia from his mother and carried her up the stairs to the apartment. Lia was asleep and he placed her in her little bed and left the door to the bedroom ajar.

As feeding time came and Lia began to cry, Mamma rushed into the bedroom ahead of me and ordered me, "Get the diapers. The baby needs to be changed before you start to feed her."

While I was taking the diapers and the talcum from the bedroom, Mamma has already undressed her and placed her on the couch. I came close to her, trying to take over the task, but she didn't move. She took the diaper from me and began to show me how it had to be folded and how it had to be put on the baby.

Giulio saw that she was not allowing me to do anything and said, "Mamma, let Lala do it."

"I am showing her how we do it here, maybe in Russia they are doing it differently."

"Diapers are diapers," said Giulio, "it doesn't matter how you put them on, as long as they stay in place."

By this time Mamma had finished changing the baby and gave her to me saying, "Now you can feed her."

I sat on the chair and began to nurse. Mamma stood next to me and said, "You are holding the baby wrong way," and she began to change baby to a different position.

I said to Giulio, "The nurse in the hospital showed me to hold the baby this way while feeding. Please, tell this to your mother."

Giulio patiently explained this to her and added, "Mamma, you have to let Lala to take care of the baby."

"I have to show her how to do it right," she replied, almost offended by the Giulio's remarks. "I don't want her to take care of '*my* baby girl' in the foreign ways."

Giulio gave up and told me, "Lala, please be patient with my mother. She means well. It is the first day that the baby is home. After, she couldn't do it all by herself, taking care of the baby, cooking, cleaning, washing... You should try to take over the tasks of caring for the baby slowly without upsetting her."

I didn't agree with him, but there was nothing to do but wait and see how things would be in the future. Nevertheless, I felt that she was taking my daughter from me especially, when she was calling her "*my* baby girl."

After I finished feeding Lia, I gave her to Giulio to hold. I remembered how eager he was to hold her in the hospital and now he could enjoy her as long as he wanted. My

heart was filled with joy to see him so happy with our little daughter in his arms, admiring her and caressing her. I thought, "How lucky I am to have such loving father for my daughter."

Giulio said, "She is sound asleep. I will put her in her little bed."

"Cover her well with the blanket," said Mamma, "it is not very warm there. And leave the door ajar."

When Giulio returned he said to me, "You see, Mamma means well for the baby. As far as I can remember, to save the fuel, they never kept the door to the bedroom open. And now they would need to spend more money for the wood, which is very expensive."

We were talking as usual in French and I replied to him knowing that Mamma wouldn't understand my answer, "You are saying this, as if the additional expense for heating shall come from Babbo's or Domenico's wages. But you give her all of your wages and I think you are contributing toward this expense and don't need to apologize for it."

"Well," Giulio patiently tried to explain, "I want you to be aware and to appreciate how much Mamma and Babbo are doing for us in these difficult times."

"I realize this," I agreed. "But don't you think they are doing what any parents would do for their son under similar conditions?" I reflected for a while and added, "I never emphasized what my mother was doing for us in Laband. We accepted it as a normal and expected from a mother to take care of her children."

"True," confirmed Giulio, "we never talked this way about your mother, but I appreciate all that she has done for us."

"I am also grateful for all that your parents are doing for us. What I cannot understand is that you are pointing out every little thing that is done for us by your father, and especially by your mother, as if it is something exceptional, and not as a normal thing that could be expected from your parents."

"All right, all right," agreed Giulio, "but you should consider that the conditions in Laband were different. There your mother and we were in the same situation and helped each other in the time of need. Here we suddenly arrived in the family and they accepted us to share their roof, bed, and food, but, most of all, they had to renounce some of their own comfort to accommodate us. They are making sacrifices for our benefit and we should recognize this." And he concluded, "That's the difference."

I understood Giulio's reasoning and agreed that here the situation was different. But I couldn't agree with his supersensitive pointing to every small thing that his mother was doing for us and I was annoyed being constantly reminded about it. But now I had told him my point of view and hoped that he would also be sensitive to my feelings. Therefore, I concluded the discussion by saying, "Good, now we understand each other."

After the childbirth, according to the folk customs, Mamma didn't allow me to touch cold water for forty days. She washed clothes and baby's diapers and didn't allow me even to wash the dishes, because rinsing was done in cold water.

Bathing the baby involved a lot of patience on my part; Mamma was constantly supervising me and correcting me, because according to her I never could hold her right. Then there was the matter of wrapping the baby in the blanket, "You wrap her in a foreign way," she reproached me. "Here we do it this way." And she would unwrap and redo it to show me how it should be done "The right way."

Soon after we brought Lia from the hospital, she developed *la crosta lattea*, an insidious crusty eczema on her scalp. It was itchy and we had to make little mittens for her and cover her head with a cotton bonnet to keep her from scratching. I was convinced it was probably an infection contracted in the hospital, but pediatrician Doctor Crosetti told us that it was because she was not digesting milk well. According to him, there was nothing to do but to wait until she was weaned from milk and could eat other food. Meanwhile it was good to allow it to purge itself, and to keep the crust oiled with olive oil, and not to wash it with water, but daily remove it carefully as it became loose.

I had also another idea that some vitamins could be helpful for quicker healing and remembered that at home we used to make carrot juice to drink as a vitamin supplement. So, one day when Mamma went to the market, I shredded a carrot and squeezed the juice and poured it in a bottle that we used to give her sweetened water to pacify her when she was crying. When Lia woke up, I breastfed her for a while and then gave her the carrot juice. She liked it and began to suck it with pleasure. At that moment Mamma returned from the market.

"What are you feeding her? What is this yellow water you are giving her?" she screamed grabbing the bottle from Lia's mouth and making her cry.

"It's carrot juice," I replied innocently, "In Russia all babies are given carrot juice."

"Are you crazy? Do you want to poison 'my little girl'?" she screamed again and poured the juice in the sink. She removed her coat and forcefully took Lia from me, trying to calm her down.

I was upset and began also to cry. Mamma couldn't calm the baby, who was still hungry; I finally convinced her to give her to me to finish breastfeeding her. When she fell asleep I placed her in her bed and didn't return to the kitchen, but stayed in the bedroom crying for a long time.

Before Giulio and Babbo would arrive for lunch, Mamma came in the room and accused me, "Are you trying to stay here until Giulio comes home so you can complain that his mother doesn't treat you right? Wait until I tell him what you were feeding to his baby! Raw carrot juice! Luckily I came on time to stop you. You better come out, wash your face and set the table!"

Reluctantly I followed her orders. But when Giulio came home, Mamma was the first to complain to him about his wife's foreign customs and how I almost poisoned his daughter.

I explained to Giulio that carrot juice was commonly given to babies in Russia and he agreed that there was nothing wrong giving it to Lia. "But you must understand," he justified his mother's action, "that here in Italy we have oranges and nobody gives carrot juice to babies."

"But she should not have acted so violently, grabbing the bottle from the baby's mouth, making her cry, and screaming at me," I complained.

Giulio calmed me down, and switched to calming his mother, explaining to her that I didn't do anything wrong, to which she objected most emphatically.

At that moment entered Babbo and Mamma began to complain to him about what I had done wrong. "She treats in foreign ways 'my baby girl.' Could you imagine, she was giving her to drink raw carrot juice! Luckily I came on time to stop her."

Babbo calmly replied, "Don't exaggerate, all that raw carrot juice could have done

to the baby is to give her diarrhea.” And added with impatience, “Let’s eat, I have to return to work on time.”

That evening Giulio consoled me and promised that he would try really hard to find an apartment for us so we could bring up the baby without interference from his mother.

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1. The largest hospital in Turin located beyond Valentino City’s Park along the River Po.

## Part Fifteen

### Waiting For Destiny



# Waiting for the Letters

As Remembered by Antonina G. Gladky

Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

It was already the end of November and, except for the two postcards and a telegram sent from Prague, there were no letters from my daughter and Giulio. Not knowing if they were receiving my letters through the mail, I decided to send my letter through an Italian who was going home soon and was trying to find him at the market in Katowice.

On November 29, 1945, I wrote them a very long letter.<sup>1</sup> In it I complained about not receiving any letters from them and that I worried about Lala's health and about the birth of the little one.

About myself, I assured them that I am remaining at Rufin's home as a member of the family. However, during the day I travel to the market and return home in the evening very tired. For this reason and also because it is becoming very cold to remain outside all day long, I am thinking about changing my work.

I also shared with them my concern that I could not even imagine what would happen to me in the future. I informed my daughter that I wrote to Monsieur Demey<sup>2</sup> and that I forwarded him Giulio's and my addresses with a hope that if my husband is alive, he would write to him. I also asked him if it was possible for him to send me some kind of a document stating that I was French—I thought that it could become useful in the future to have alternative nationality.

I mentioned that I disappeared from Laband in a big hurry and never returned back. Regarding our "cousins," as we agreed to refer to Soviets, I said that they are still here, but not all, only a few but like those we worked with in Laband—they would understand that I meant NKVD.

I regretted that my daughter and Giulio departed so quick that we had no time to discuss their future and mine. At that time it seemed that our separation shouldn't be very long and that we would see each other soon. Before their departure I hadn't the time to give them my advice and as a mother I felt that I should write it now.

To my daughter I wrote, "Lala, don't forget that you have a difficult character and Giulio is hot-tempered and nervous. I don't know how the family life is over there, but I am sure that it is different than it was in our family. You should know that all Giulio's requests are probably well grounded and you should conform to them."

To Giulio I wrote, "I remember all our conversations and that you were almost always right; most of all, you could anticipate the events that were ahead of us. That's why I hope that in your life with Lala you could always protect her, as you have done it until now. I hope that you always would be gentle with her and never forget that she lost her parents and found you. It was her destiny to encounter you far from her motherland." Then I advised him: "Your life with Lala will depend mostly from you. You should show her your ideal of married life; but don't be pedant and don't forget that she has also her individual character." And I asked him to remember that she was not prepared to be a

mother, but that I hope this would come under the guidance and protection of his mother and that I was sure that she would become a good mother and a good wife.

For some reason I didn't finish writing this letter and it was not mailed for a few days. Then, on December 4, 1945 when I returned from the market, a joyous surprise was waiting for me. Lidia, all radiant, gave me a letter from my daughter. I began to cry from joy. This was the first letter<sup>3</sup> that my daughter wrote on October 17, 1945, a few days after they arrived in Turin, Italy. I quickly read it in French and then translated it word by word to Lidia:

Our dear Maman! We arrived in Turin on October 13. In Prague all the papers were ready in one day; we were not the first in our situation. Also it was very good that we departed with the convoy train—the things were much easier and it was better with food.

From Prague we passed through the Munich American Repatriation Assembly Center. Naturally, there were not too many commodities on the train. But in general everything went fine and we arrived at home in good health.

The family, which is very simple, without too many pretenses, received me very well and I am very pleased with this. However, there are too many people for this small apartment. We will try to change the situation as soon as possible.

All Giulio's problems<sup>4</sup> were resolved without complications. On the first of November Giulio will begin to work at the same place where he worked before.

The life here in general is hard, but it is possible to live if one is working. The prices are approximately like in Poland, but the workers receive higher wages. Today I went for a medical visit. Everything is regular.

Of course, she wrote that they were hoping that all my affairs concluded well and asked where I am living now; how was my market business going; and how was my health.

At the end she she wrote, "We will never forget to thank Rufin and his wife for all they have done for us." And before forwarding their greetings she said, "I hope to see you next year.

As I was reading this letter I cried from joy. And what a joy it was! I was so happy that everything was going well and that all were in good health.

But now that the first letter from Italy arrived I was hoping that the others would follow. Now it didn't matter so much that we could not see each other soon. It was sufficient for me to receive their letters to feel happy. It was enough for me to read the news about their life. My preoccupation about my daughter almost disappeared. She was safe.

But the letter was written in October. Naturally, I was eager to know the most recent news about the birth of my grandchild that was due in the middle of November. Was the baby healthy? Was it Alfio or Lia?<sup>5</sup> And, of course, how was my daughter's health after the childbirth?

But the destiny of my husband was remaining much on my mind. Did he survived? Was he successful in avoiding being captured by the Soviets? Or was he already deported to the concentration camp in Siberia?

I was also worrying about my own situation and avoided to have close

encounters with the Soviet soldiers on the market, but there were none in Michalkowice. And I kept the Polish neighbors well provided with good coffee to keep them happy and to prevent them from reporting me to the Polish police.

I was becoming very skillful businesswoman on the market and was finding the new ways of procuring the merchandise for resale. The Polish police was not allowing the German women to do business on the market. This policy against them was in response to the annexation of this part of Poland to Germany at the beginning of World War II. Knowing this, I went to several nearby villages and offered my services to the German women to sell their merchandise for a reasonable commission and to buy, or barter for them the products they order. Soon I had many German women who were seeking my services and I became known in the neighboring villages as a reliable person to do the business with. The women were entrusting me with very expensive items knowing that I will sell them at the best price on the market.

Lidia and Rufin were very impressed with my entrepreneurial skills and appreciated my providing them with food, which with Rufin's salary would not have been possible for them to have. Although in the fall the weather was cold and it was hard for me to stay the whole day on the market, I bravely resisted wind, rain, and mud. Then the winter came and with it more cold, ice, and snow. I had to stop going in the villages and limited myself to conduct my business only on the market. It was helpful that the days were shorter and I was coming home earlier. I knew that I had to earn not only my rent and upkeep, but also to repay Lidia and Rufin for their help and the risk they were taking in hiding me from the Soviets.

During the weeks before Christmas there was an increase in the activity on the market, many nice things changed hands and one could find to buy, or barter all kinds of food. This was the first Christmas after the end of war and people wanted to celebrate it as a real holiday. I found several items to buy for my daughter, hoping that the time shall come when I will be able to mail her a package. On the last week before Christmas Lidia asked me to find mutton meat for the roast, and beef for the soup. It did cost me a lot of zloty, but I was glad that I could find it and make her happy.

Rufin had holiday vacation and he found a nice Christmas tree and decorated it. It was beautiful! On Christmas Eve we all went to the Midnight Mass that was celebrated according to the Catholic tradition. On Christmas day Lidia prepared a festive dinner: soup with meat and pasta, roast of mutton with potatoes, and compote from cherries she preserved in the summer.

After an abundant dinner Rufin sprawled himself on the sofa to rest. Lidia and I cleared the table and also rested. Our leisurely conversation centered on my daughter and Giulio. We were guessing how they were celebrating their first Christmas in their new family and with the new holiday customs. We hoped that their Christmas dinner was as abundant as ours.

On December 26, I wrote a very long letter<sup>6</sup> to my daughter and Giulio. Rufin, Lidia, and I congratulated them with Christmas and with their birthdays, Giulio's on December 22, and Lala's on January 14, and the baby's that should have been sometime in November. I wished them to be in good health, from which depended everything else, happiness, good mood, wealth, and all the good things in life. I expressed my hope that they had a very good Christmas and described my Christmas with Rufin and Lidia—all the traditional ceremonies, the beautiful Christmas tree, and a very good festive dinner.

Then I informed them about practical aspects of my life. "I work for my new family as I was working with you. My commercial affairs [on the market] could be measured by how we live and eat; it is like we used to eat in the last months with you. Naturally, it is very difficult to remain now outside when it is cold, but what can I do, one needs to live the way as the life demands it." I also said that I purchased something for them hoping that the time will come when I could send them the packages and also some money.

I knew that they worry about my health, so I reassured them, "My stomach, thank God, was very good during the two months that I am at Rufin's home. I think that being nervous was making it to hurt before."

About my mood and how I felt, I wrote, "The time goes by very quickly and the future comes by itself without my inviting it. It is very hard to remain alone, but I was lucky that I am in one family that is happy, in good health, always in good mood, and very serene. ...As you can see, the conditions of my life are very good, I cannot complain, except that I miss you. Maybe to be alone will become a habit before my life will turn in other direction."

I gave my daughter practical advice on nursing the baby. I told her that I couldn't imagine how she manage to do everything and how I would like to be with her, to help her, and to care for her.

Of course, I asked her to write all the details about her life and about the baby. And I also sent my, Rufin's and Lidia's kisses to all three of them and our regards to all Verro family.

Finally, on January 13, 1946, we have received a postcard,<sup>7</sup> mailed on November 14, 1945 from Turin, Italy, with the greetings of the newborn little Lia. Now, at least I knew that I had a granddaughter.

But there were no more letters from my daughter or from Giulio. I began to lose my patience waiting for the news and on January 16 I mailed a postcard<sup>8</sup> with short message: "Always waiting for the news from you, dearest Lala, Giulio, and little Lia. Good health to my granddaughter! We congratulate you with the newborn. And how I would like to be with you and help you. ...But I am sad, because I don't receive any letters from you. ...It is very painful, but what I can do, maybe it is difficult for you to write, or it is a problem with the mail."

Another week, went by and there were no letters. I was worrying and had no patience any more. On January 23 I mailed the second postcard<sup>9</sup> complaining that, I have written often, but I don't receive anymore from them, except the postcards from Prague, the letter mailed when they arrived in Turin in October, and the postcard notifying Lia's birth. I said that it is very painful for me, because I worry about the health of Lala and the little Lia.

I mentioned that my business was going with great difficulty and I was afraid about my future because I didn't know how long I could remain in the Rufin's home. And I asked their opinion on what I should do when arrives a moment that I had to leave?

At the end I added, that I wrote to my father, asking him if by any chance my husband arrived home. However, I didn't write them that it was probably a big mistake to disclose my address in Poland; but I was so anxious to find anything about him and acted on the spur of the moment putting myself in danger to be found and deported 'home.'

January, then February of 1946 went by without news from my dear ones. Then half of March was gone—it was five-and-half months since they left Poland on the first of October, 1945. All kinds of bad thoughts were coming to my mind, “What might have happened to my daughter? Maybe the childbirth had not been easy and she is sick. But then Giulio should have written to me. It seems impossible that there was something wrong with both of them.”

Rufin and Lidia were reassuring me that it was just a problem of post-war mail between the countries and that I should have more patience. It was easy for them to tell me this, but it was not easy for me to stop worrying after not knowing anything about my daughter for such a long time.

Finally, in the evening of March 15 when I arrived home from the market, Rufin gave me the letter from my daughter. It was the second letter<sup>10</sup> from her since they left Laband. Without removing my coat and boots, I began reading it aloud because it was written in German and Rufin and Lidia could hear the news.

January 27, 1946, Turin

Dear Mama, Rufin and Lidia! I have written you a letter long time ago, but I don't know if you received it. I think it is better to tell you shortly everything from the beginning. We were on the road only thirteen days; we were three days in Prague and more then a week in a American Repatriation Assembly Center in Munich. ...I was not the only woman in the convoy train.

On November 6, 1945 we got married in the Town Hall in Turin. On November 12, little Lia was born. She is already weighing 4,400 grams and when she was born she was 2,900 grams. She is very lively. She is the first person in our home. We are happy that she is healthy and grows very fast. She has quick gray eyes and beautiful little feet.

I feel very good in the family, much better then I expected. Only it is difficult to find for us an apartment. We are six persons in one small bedroom and the kitchen. Giulio is working at his old place. The wages are low and everything is expensive. For our family it is little bit easier, because we have three men who are working. Notwithstanding that the heating is the most expensive item, we are heating for our little one to stay warm.

With the Italian language everything goes well. I understand almost everything. Naturally, with the little one is hard to find the time to study grammar. And in addition, we have enough to wash, to iron, and to mend for the three men, the baby, and us, two women.

There is so much to tell and it is impossible to put everything in one letter. You should have also many news and we are hoping to receive a letter from you soon.

Lala was asking me about my health, where I am working; and if I heard anything about Aunt Antonina and children.<sup>11</sup> Their mail with France was now regular and she wrote already one letter to Monsieur Demey—“maybe some news from Papa and Zoya<sup>12</sup> will come from him.”

She ends abruptly her letter because “Lia needs to be fed by now and it is already twelve o'clock at night.”

On January 28 there are brief additions to the letter, “[Today] we all were so happy! we finally have received your first letter. We all pray God to help you. I hope to see you soon. Is it possible?” And a note from Giulio to Rufin giving him the good news about Bruno<sup>13</sup> who came home only two months before them and that he is also working in his old place.

There was also a note from Giulio’s parents and Domenico with their sincere greetings and best wishes. And finally, “the warmest kisses and a lot of gratitude” from Giulio and Lala.

I read aloud my daughter’s letter several times and the three of us, Lidia, Rufin, and I, discussed all the news. We were trying to imagine the life in this Italian family where my daughter was living now. Lidia and Rufin were envious of my daughter and Giulio for having a little Lia. When we were trying to imagine how big Lia was now Lidia commented, “How lucky they are to have a baby!”

But Rufin, for whom the subject about the babies was like a thorn in their otherwise very happy marriage, changed the discussion to other news in the letter, “They got married in the Town Hall just in time before Lia was born giving her legitimate status and a name.”

Two days later, I received the third letter from my daughter mailed on February 11, 1946 from Turin.<sup>14</sup> This time I had a double bonus. Both my daughter and Giulio wrote and they were in French, which I preferred to those previously written in German which Rufin and Lidia could understand.

In this letter my daughter was asking my forgiveness for not writing her letters more often and explained her every day routine: “In the morning I have to spend lots of time with the little one, to feed her, clean her, change the diapers. Then I go to buy bread and wine in the nearby shops. After I return, Mamma goes to the market and to the cooperative to buy food, and then she cooks. I put in order all the clothes of our three workers, and of the little one; and put in order the bedroom.”

She describes also the food they eat: “In the morning for breakfast we have chicory coffee with some milk. When Giulio, Domenico, and Babbo (that’s Dad in Italian) arrive for lunch we have soup, or macaroni with tomato sauce, and then meat, or sausage, or fish with vegetables, and for dessert we always have some kind of fruit. With the meal we drink wine diluted with water. We have similar menu for the supper as for lunch.”

And the rest of the day they also have plenty to do: “After lunch we wash the dishes, put in order the kitchen where every day we mop the floor; and every day we have to wash clothes and diapers of the little one and clothes of our three men. But it goes smoothly like this, if the little one remains good, which is not very often and then we are late with our chores. Then we wash the dishes, collect the washed clothes from the cloth line off the balcony and take care of the little one.”

The evenings are also busy—they mend the socks and underwear. Now I could imagine how much work should be done for the family of six. And it seems that my daughter begins to accept it when she writes, “It is the duty of all the Italian women who have family.”

I was glad to hear that she gained lots of weight but it created a problem that none of her dresses fit her any more. However, she managed herself to alter the black coat with the fur and is planning to alter her dresses. It was good that they brought with

them all the clothes and fabrics that I insisted they would take and she confirms it, "In the spring, we need to make for me a suit and need to spend money only for a dressmaker." However, they need to buy for her the shoes. I thought right away that I could buy them here, but then... how to mail them.

Of course, Lala knew that I was interested more than anything else to hear about Lia and she gave me a good report about her: "Lia was born in good health, very vigorous and lively. She has a very nice smile, she recognizes our voices, she babbles, and she is already artful. She likes to be held and be walked around the room, and listen to Giulio's singing. The Grandfather and Grandmother, *Nonno* and *Nonna*, love the little one very much. They try to do for her everything possible. The Grandmother has already knitted for her a set from the white wool for the spring. Giulio loves the little one very much, but he has always in his head to have also Alfio in the future!"

I was not too pleased to hear that my daughter doesn't have too much milk and Lia doesn't digest her milk too well. So, now after nursing her Lala adds some sterilized cow's milk. Doctor says that because of this, she has eczema on her scalp.

However, my daughter gave me the good news by saying, "I feel very good in the family and I think that Mamma and Babbo like me too." After the childbirth Mamma didn't allowed her to even wash the dishes for forty days. It seems that she is slowly learning the rules and the customs of her new family but Giulio's mother was surprised many times about our customs and about Lala's homemaking skills.

Lala hopes that when she will speak Italian better, she shall find work for herself because they need to have their own apartment, but for now they have no choice but to stay with the family.

Most of all I was glad to hear that everything was fine in her relationship with her husband, as she wrote: "With Giulio we are even crazier about each other than in the past. He pampers me very much. I think that a husband should be more severe."

Of course, she is fearing and worrying about me with 'our cousins' being here and tells me, "I always pray God to help you and to give you strength to overcome our separation," but she hopes to embrace me in her home. She writes that Giulio as usual is an optimist and is sure to see me soon, "But I am like you—the pessimist. However, after everything went for us like we hoped for, I have more hope that everything shall also end well for you... I think that your destiny shall be decided suddenly in one week, as it was with us."

I was happy to receive Lia's first kiss to her Baba and that Lala feels more cheerful after receiving my two letters with good news about my health.

There were nice additions at the end of the letter. Especially one stating, "We remember Rufin and Lidia every day and our little Lia will remember them always in the future, because they helped her to have a father and the family."

On the other side of the page was a letter<sup>15</sup> from Giulio written also in French:

Our dear Maman, After having waited and almost lost hope, we finally received your first letter on January 28; now we are more tranquil and most of all happy to know about your good health. During all this time that we were without news from you, we thought about the worst thing, that you departed with 'our cousins' and, therefore, we didn't write to you any more. After the two days... we received your second letter. Now Lala and I feel guilty about being lazy and not

writing to you more often.

Maman, we read your letters many times from the beginning to the end, and our memories go back to the past, the time when you were near and were taking care of your children.<sup>16</sup> At that moment we feel how much gratitude and affection we owe you.

Well let's talk a little bit about Lia. To tell you the truth, I was expecting Alfio, but I am very happy with my little girl, whom I love and who is for me the most beautiful of all the others. In the evening, when I return from work, I walk in the room holding her in my arms, because she is very lively and doesn't want to go to sleep. Everybody in our home loves her and we are her slaves.

Lala is in good health and happy. The two of us are even closer to each other than in the past. She already speaks well Italian and begins to go out to shop in the nearby bakery.

I am placing in the letter one photo of Lia and another that I think you remember well which was done before our departure; after we will mail you some others, ours and of the little one. Please express our gratitude to Rufin and Madam Lidia for all the generosity that they had for us and now also for you. Tell them that we are waiting for their visit to Italy.

I am asking you to take good care of your health and to be cheerful, because we hope to see you soon.

Regards from my parents. My regards to Rufin and Madam Lidia. A big kiss to you. Giulio.

Because these letters were written in French I had to translate them to Rufin and Lidia. That evening after supper our conversation was dominated by the news we received and by the impression each of us had about different aspects in Lala's and Giulio's life. All three of us agreed that my daughter's life was very busy and she worked from morning until night.

Lidia noticed that mother-in-law was treating Lala well and that she and Giulio were remaining close to each other. Rufin commented that it was strange that they remained until now to live with Giulio's parents. I was happy that Lia was growing well, except for the problems of digestion and the resulting eczema.

And Lidia said in her sweet voice, "It looks like they are spoiling Lia. And who wouldn't love such a small baby."

Rufin, who himself liked to eat well, said, "They don't have a shortage of food and eat well."

Lidia added, almost not hiding her envy, "And Giulio is planning to have in the future a baby boy."

At the end of our exchange of impressions I concluded, "The important thing is that they are safe and far from the claws of the Soviets."

To this Rufin remarked, "In this little town you are also safe from the Soviets. They remained now only in the big towns and in the cities."

"It's true," I replied, "but those are not the Soviet Army units, those are the NKVD branches. You will see that slowly they would have their agents in the small towns too."

"Soviets will go home soon," Rufin contradicted me calmly.

"You are forgetting," I said, "that they annexed eastern part of Poland before the

war. Now that they are here, they will never leave the rest of Poland.”

Rufin raised his voice and replied proudly, “Now we have a new Polish Government of National Unity to which Soviets agreed—it means that this part of Poland will be an independent state and...”

“Rufin, please,” Lidia interfered in our disagreement, “stop arguing. Nobody knows for sure what the Soviets will do. Only the time will show what will happen.”

“You will see,” I insisted, “they will never abandon what they have occupied. They will make sure that the new government in Poland is a Communist government as they did it in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania before the war. I can guarantee it—you will remember my words.”

“Please, Pani,” Lidia pleaded with me, “we cannot change anything by arguing.” And she repeated, “Only time will show what will happen.”

We remained in silence for some time. Then I said, “You know, now that I know more about the life of my daughter, I feel that she needs some advice from me on how to take care of Lia. I better write her a letter right away.” And I began that evening to write. However I had so many things in my mind that I wanted to tell my daughter that I was adding and changing it so many times that I finished it more than a week later<sup>17</sup> after I received from her one more letter.

“My dearest children,” I began my letter, “you probably can imagine my joy when one evening I returned home from the market and Rufin gave me your letter. Now I am tranquil knowing about your life, that everything, thank God, is fine with all of you; most of all that the little one is fine and is growing well.”

However, I was concerned if the eczema on her scalp was already healed and advised Lala to give Lia the juice of carrots and other fruits and wine. “It is too bad,” I commented, “that you, Lala, are very poor nurse, because the milk of the mother is the health of the baby.” But, I was happy that otherwise Lia was healthy, and that’s what counts. Lala was also in good health and Giulio was in good mood. That’s important and from it depended all the rest.

I was pleased that Lia loves the songs. It’s as if she knew that her grandmother would like her to become a famous Italian musician or a singer. I told them that one should accustom her from infancy to music and I asked if they had a radio to make her listen to the Italian music and songs, as we have and listen to here.

Lia’s photo delighted me but I complained that I couldn’t see her face well because it was taken from too far. But she seems to be very gentle. I was interested to know all about my granddaughter and asked them to write if she resembles the father or the mother And I wondered when we could see each other.

About my health, I wrote, all goes as before; my stomach sometimes is better, sometimes not. The last time it was bad, maybe resulted from my work in the winter. “Could you imagine my figure on the road in the snow and rain? Well, it continues to be the same. Also I worry that my work now is slowing down, and it is difficult to make some money. I survived the winter, but how! My God, one cannot describe all that I went through!”

“When I am returning home alone from the market, I remember very vividly our returns with Giulio, all our conversations, and discussions... and I feel how much I miss you. With the tears in my eyes I automatically move toward my new home. There awaits me the supper, the warm room, and the bath.”

At that time I ask myself if I have to be unhappy. Considering what happened to others, I have to say "No". But ... "I regret that I cannot work for you; to help you in this difficult time and that later it will be too late."

I assured Lala and Giulio that I am making everything to thank Rufin and Lidia for their help. But I wonder for how long I could enjoy their hospitality. So, I look to find some other work, but it is very difficult—my Polish is not perfect yet.

I had the opposite opinion about Lala's and Giulio's hope to see me soon. I asked them, "How it would happen? This is an enigma that I am afraid to think about." Because to me it seems impossible and I see the black clouds on the horizon. I was hoping that they would understand my mood reading that some of 'our cousins' departed but lately arrived the new ones; and it seems that these would like to remain here. "We don't like their new visit." And I wondered, "When this is going to finish? It is hard on my nerves—you understand."

I expressed my gratitude to the parents of Giulio for having recognized my daughter as the member of their family and told Lala, "You should make everything to be worthy of this honorable and good family. Tell them that I am sending them my cordial greetings and infinite thanks."

Of course, as in all other letters, there were greetings and embraces from Rufin, Lidia and me to all and kisses to the little one. And I signed: "God bless you. Your mother."

Every day in the evening I read again and again the letters from my children and look at Lia's photo. I want to believe that everything goes well with them. But there were so many things that I wanted to share with them. So, only ten days later, on March 25, 1946, I felt in the mood and wrote another<sup>18</sup> letter without waiting for their answer.

My husband's fate was always on my mind and I asked Lala and Giulio for their thoughts. "Now that your destiny is decided, I think sadly about Papa. Where is he? Why he is not writing to you, he knows Giulio's address, but there are no news from him. Isn't it very strange?..I also think about Igor. Where is he? Is it possible that we shall never receive the news about him and his family?"

There was no answer from my father to my letter mailed to Slavyansk but, although I was placing myself in danger, I said that I will try to write once more to find out if my husband returned home.

Although my work was going very slow, I reassured Lala and Giulio that I was earning enough to pay for the food for the whole family; and, because from one day to another the food was becoming more and more expensive, we purchased flour, fat, and other products to have in reserve.

Then I added a short message to Giulio asking him to write how he considers his little wife as a mother, and if she got used to take care of Lia. Also, I asked him if Lala proved to be up to his expectations, to his ideal. Or simply stated, "Didn't she descend yet from the pedestal?" And I thanked him very much for his tender letter and said that the memories about him will remain always with me.

I also congratulated them all ahead of time with Easter, "*Khristos voskres!*"<sup>19</sup> and wished them more than anything else good health.

Then I wrote a few words to Giulio's parents:

Dear Nonno, and dear Nonna.<sup>20</sup> I thank you very much for your kindness

that you demonstrated to my daughter. I have no doubt that such good and gentle man as Giulio has the parents that are honorable and good.

Dear Nonna, I am asking you very much to protect my daughter. Remember that she lost her parents and everything. And finding Giulio far from her Motherland she has to learn to keep the house and to take care of her little daughter. I don't doubt that Lala would be worthy of your family and of the new Fatherland. Ciao and kisses, Antonina.

In a few days after I mailed the letter to my daughter I had a big surprise. I remained at home to prepare something for my business but I had a presentiment on the evening before and I said to *Pani* Lidia, "Tomorrow I should receive a letter. And it really happened. That letter<sup>21</sup> was in the mail only a few weeks, this was a very short time compared to those I was receiving until now. Obviously, the mail between Italy and Poland was improving. This time it was again in German which Lidia and Rufin could understand and I read it aloud.

March 3, 1946, Turin

Our dearest Mama! Today is Sunday.. Everybody is already asleep. But my little Lia doesn't want to sleep and I have to dance carrying her in my arms from 6:30 in the evening.

Poor little girl, she is very nervous and restless, because her little scalp is bothering her. In Italian it is called *la crosta latte*.<sup>22</sup> It is not a serious illness, but she scratches herself all the time. The doctor said that there is nothing that can heal it and that it should purge itself. We lubricate her scalp with the olive oil and she wears the mittens attached with cording to her wrists. We are very displeased with this. But, I have only a trickle of my milk and the little one is on the powdered cow's milk that I receive for her from UNRRA nutritional aid center for children and pregnant women. Lia can already hold her small bottle and, all in all, she grows well. You can see it on her photo included in the letter. I hope that you received already the other one in the previous letter.

The time is flying fast. The winter here is already gone by and very quickly. Now it rains hard and without end, like in the fall. It is raining the second day and it could rain the whole week. However, soon the spring will be in full bloom. I have to sew for Lia light summer dresses and let her be free from heavy clothing. She likes to be held in one's arms, listen to the song and always to be walked, and walked. This takes a lot of time.

Life in this apartment is very uncomfortable. Domenico does not live with his wife. When we came here he was already staying with his parents. He has a very pretty little daughter. And it is too bad that she is living without her father. Sleeping arrangements are very inconvenient. Giulio sleeps with Domenico in the kitchen on a couch with the chairs added to it. I sleep with Mamma and Babbo on a huge bed in the bedroom. We hope that it will be possible to find soon some kind of apartment. But for this we must have a lot of money.

The food here is good. The whole winter we had vegetables, fruits, meat, and wine. Naturally, all is expensive and we are going with money penny to penny (that's what Mamma who is in charge of purse strings is telling us).

I began already to know a little about the City of Turin. Every Sunday Giulio and I go for a walk. Around the city are the mountains with beautiful panorama and the air is very healthy. It is too bad that all old trees disappeared; people did cut them down for heating during the war. But the City is very beautiful. Yes, the Alps I have seen very well on the border between Austria and Italy when we were transported on the trucks across the mountains. It was in the fall. And I had also seen the beautiful Prague—it was gorgeous!

With Giulio we are always close and he never forgets to buy for me something sweet. Every Sunday we go for a walk or to the movies. One cannot ask him to be better than he is.

It is long time that I had no letters from you. And it makes me think that something bad did happen then I become restless. Since we left Laband, I received only three letters from you. When I receive them, my mood goes up. All the time you are in my mind and I worry about your life. This work at the market is already too hard for you; and any other you cannot do there. All the time I pray God to help you. Mama, you should also pray God to help you not to lose hope that time will come when we will see each other again and for you to know little Lia.

Why are you writing about mailing us a package and money? Think about yourself. Especially the money, they are impossible to exchange here. However, if you can find for me a dictionary whether it will be German-Italian, or Russian-Italian, or Russian-French, and also Russian grammar, it will be a big help for me. Here these books are very expensive...

Forgive me that my writing is not very accurate and with many mistakes. I am writing at night, being half-asleep, and forgive me that I don't write more often, but I am always thinking about you and weep.

The little Lia is kissing her Baba, uncle Rufin and aunt Lidia. We kiss you all with love. Your Lala and Giulio.

At the end of the letter there were many additions. The most important was from Babbo: "Regards from our whole family. With the hope to see you soon. Verro Ermengardo." And P.S. from Giulio: "I am including in this letter two photos with hope that the next time they will be better..."

After reading this letter together we discussed with Lidia and Rufin about the life of my daughter in Giulio's family and about little Lia's health.

Rufin emphasized, "You see, your daughter didn't receive yet all your letters that you wrote. This means that it is the problem with the international mail." I agreed with his reasoning.

Then I wondered, "How Lala could sleep in the same bed with her in-laws?"

And Rufin answered, "When Giulio and your daughter came to visit us and stayed overnight, all four of us slept in our bed. Probably, their bed is at least as big as ours."

I got up and went in their bedroom to see if it was possible for the three people to sleep on it comfortably.

Rufin jokingly asked, "Do you want us to go there and the three of us would try to lie on the bed, so you would be sure that there is plenty of room?" And he and Lidia began to laugh.

"No, it is not necessary; I see that it's possible."

Lidia, holding the photos of Lia and admiring her, said, "How lucky Giulio and Lala are to have such a beautiful little girl." And giving me the photo added, "Look how pretty she is!"

I also admired her photo and emitting a deep sigh said, "How I would like to hold her in my arms! I cannot imagine if one day it would be possible."

"Of course, it will be possible!" exclaimed Rufin. "Do you think that for the rest of your life you will be living with us? As soon as the life in Europe will normalize after the chaos created by the war, anyone will be able to travel anywhere, as in the good old days. We probably will travel together with you to Italy."

"Rufin, you are an optimist," I replied, "and I am a pessimist. But I wish that you are right."

"Of course, I am right," Rufin said with such conviction that I couldn't contradict him anymore.

On April 1, 1946 I wrote another very long letter<sup>23</sup> to my daughter.

I began by telling that I expected her to be a good nurse, because as a mother I had enough milk to satisfy her. Lia's illness worried me very much. Maybe the reason for it was deficiency in nourishment; therefore, one should improve it. I suggested, if it was possible, to give Lia the juice of carrots and naturally all other fruits.

Another advice to her was to stop thinking so much about me and to think more about her little daughter and most of all not to worry all the time. Because all her life should be dedicated first of all to the baby and then to her husband. Also I reminded her to take care of her own health, because happiness of the family depends from it. Her good mood is as sunlight for the whole family. She should always remember this and forget everything else. To look after the baby is a lot of work, one has to have patience and to be always calm.

From the few letters that I received so far from my daughter I learned a lot about her life and now I could imagine well her busy daily routine. I told her "That's why I regret so much that I am not with you to help you. And it is a pity that I cannot mail you some money. However, I didn't lose yet my hope to see you again; I know that I need to be patient and need to wait."

I thought that she would be pleased to know that on March 12, we had in our home a celebration to mark Lia's fourth month birthday. We had a glass of wine to the health of family Verro and to the health of Lia. The parents of Lidia, *Pan* and *Pani* Pietrowski, came also for the celebration.

"As you can see," I said, "we pass the time well and you should not make a tragedy that your mother is suffering and that she is unhappy. We are all relaxed, everybody is happy with me, all are esteeming me, and I know well how to recompense and how to thank for all that Rufin and Lidia are doing for me."

I explained that here it is Rufin who is the spoiled baby. If we would see each other, there will be a lot to tell about this family. When on Saturday we are all at home, I have the occasion to observe them well and I can say, "Happy is the husband who is satisfied with his little wife, and the wife who loves her husband who deserves it."

I mentioned that I met here on the market one Italian who said that he is a comrade of Giulio; in May he should depart home to Turin. He proposed me to depart with him, but there is a question, how this could be done. Also I know that at this

moment one cannot even think about my departure knowing how crowded you are in the apartment. But I promised that if Lala need the shoes, I could ask the Italian to take them, as well as some books that she mentioned in her letter.

As about my learning the language, I told them that Polish is already my mother tongue and I am reading all the newspapers without difficulty.

I liked the photos they send me, especially the one with all three of them. But I asked Giulio to take Lia's photos closer so I could see better all of her features, her face, her eyes, her nose, her mouth.

At the end of April I received from my children another letter. One-half was from Giulio and the other half from Lala. Both were written in French. I read Giulio's letter<sup>24</sup> first:

April 3, 1946, Turin

Our dear Maman! Two days ago, after long time without any news from you, we finally received your postcard mailed on January 23, 1946. We understood from your writing that you also don't receive our letters, therefore, we shouldn't feel guilty. But it is very frustrating to wait with impatience every day and all for nothing.

You are asking my advice,<sup>25</sup> Maman, about the thing to which is very difficult to find an answer, because it is beyond our power; it's too soon to decide about when you would see us. We believe that after one year the world will be much calmer and there will be more possibility to find a solution. We can understand that the life is very difficult for you. We didn't forget the past and all fondness that we have for you. We ask you to try to have patience until it will be possible to see us again.

Our life is the same every day. Lala has a lot of work with the little one, but both of them are in good health and I hope to send you a good photo soon. Here the life is hard, but not impossible. The worst is with the apartment, it will be impossible to find one before the summer of 1947.

We are tranquil and happy that you are in the Rufin's home. Try to remain calm knowing that we always think about you. I am sending you many greetings and a big embrace. Many kisses from little Lia. Have a happy Easter. Give our regards to Rufin and Madam Lidia. Giulio.

The other half of the letter<sup>26</sup> was from Lala written on April 6, 1946.

My dearest Mama! It's because of me that this letter was not mailed yet. The whole day I am holding Lia in my arms. In the evening and at night I am sewing for her the summer dresses, because with the winter clothes is already too hot and she wants to remain free.

Her scalp is better, but the doctors tell that it is a good thing that she expels the pus and that she will feel better after. She is very little, her face is also small and fine, she resembles a lot to the little Boris Berezhnoy.<sup>27</sup> Her lips are like mine, and the eyes are petite and gray like Giulio's. She is very pretty and has a nice smile, and her eyes are smiling before her lips. She is not fat and very lively and vigorous. She gives a lot of work for me and for the whole family, but we all

love her very much.

It takes a lot of my time to write in French, but I know that it is better for you. I think about your destiny and your present situation. I hope that when the peace with Italy will be signed, it will be possible to make a request from the consulate to make you come here. And until that time you should try to improve your conditions there. We don't know how to thank Rufin and Lidia for their kindness to you. I pray much God for you and for them.

I wrote you before that on November 6, 1945 we had our civil marriage. Giulio had to run around a lot to make for me all documents [that needed to be translated] in Italian [and notarized]. Now our marriage should be valid also for 'our cousins.'

I can't write to my grandfather, because the mail is not going over there yet. Monsieur Demey didn't answer me yet. So, we have to be patient waiting to find out something about Papa.

Lia is sending her kisses to Baba and to Pan Rufin and Pani Lidia. The whole family sends their regards to all of you. I embrace you dearly and kiss you with love. Your Lala.

P.S. Finally, we have received your letter on April 12, 1946. We shall write to you again soon.

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter Olga and son-in-law Giulio [in French] Michalkowiche, Poland, November 29, 1945.

2. A French officer, ex-prisoner of war in Germany whom Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky met in a hospital in Laband where she was in an Ostarbeitern camp in 1943-1944.

3. Olga Gladky (Verro) letter to her mother [in French] Turin, Italy, October 17, 1945, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

4. Problems with his former fiancée. See the chapters "Chance, Destiny, or the Will Of God" and "The First Days In Turin."

5. Giulio selected the name Alfio for the baby-boy and Lia - for the baby-girl.

6. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, December 26, 1945, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

7. Giulio Verro, postcard to his mother-in-law, Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky [in French] Turin, Italy, November 14, 1945, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

8. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, postcard to her daughter Olga and son-in-law Giulio [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, January 16, 1945, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

9. Ibid., January 23, 1945.

10. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in German] Turin, Italy, January 27, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

11. See the chapter "Deportation of the Soviet Citizens by the NKVD."

12. Daughter of Maria Sergeyevna Litvinova, a childhood friend of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, also a co-worker of Orest M. Gladky in the printing house before and during the World War II in Slavyansk, Ukraine.

13. Bruno Zanobini, Giulio's friend. See the chapters "Italy Allies With Germany," "Italian Armistice," and "Chance, Destiny, or the Will of God."

14. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in French] Turin, Italy, February 11, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

15. Giulio Verro, letter to his mother-in-law [in French] February 6, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

16. See the chapter "Becoming Entrepreneurs "

17. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, March 15, 1945, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

18. Ibid., March 25, 1946.
19. Christ has risen! [in Russian].
20. Grandfather and Grandmother [in Italian].
21. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in German] Turin, Italy, March 3, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
22. Milk eczema - in Italian.
23. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] .Michalkowice, Poland, April 1, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
24. Giulio Verro, letter to his mother-in-law [in French] Turin, Italy, April 3, 1946.
25. Advice about how long she has to remain to live with Rufin and Lidia.
26. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in French] Turin, Italy, April 6, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
27. Son of Nikolay N. Berezhnoy.

## Letters Gave Me Strength

**As remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

The letters I was receiving from my daughter and from Giulio, although not very often, were very important in keeping up my morale. Having their news was a great consolation and it gave me the strength to patiently wait and not to lose my hope to see them and my little granddaughter in the near future.

One thing was not clear, how long I would be able to remain in Poland before the Soviets nose out my whereabouts. I was living one day at the time, but at night I couldn't fall asleep from all kinds of scenarios I was imagining could happen to me.

Rufin and especially Lidia were very good to me during the six months that I have already lived in their home and they treated me as part of their family. They were a very happy couple and the life was peaceful in their home. The relaxed atmosphere and absence of tensions in the family were very favorable for my stomach that lately was not bothering me as much as it used to before in Laband. Rufin and I had long discussions that reminded me our discussions with Giulio, which I remember always with nostalgia.

We had a very festive Easter with Rufin and Lidia and the rest of the Pietrowski family: Lidia's parents, sister Wlada, brother and sister-in-law, and the two little nieces. On Easter Sunday we all went to church for a Mass and I was surprised to see how devoted the Polish Catholics are. The church was packed with people dressed in their best clothes and all prayed standing on their knees. I also prayed God to help me to have some news about my husband.

Lidia prepared festive dinner with the food she ordered me to buy on the market. We had a mutton roast with potatoes, also the Easter cake, compote with cherries, and wine. In the middle of the table there was a basket with the colored eggs, like we used to have in my native home when I was young.

With the Easter came also the spring and the warmer days for me to be on the market in Katowice, where I continued to do business and to earn my upkeep in the Rufin's and Lidia's home. I was trying to do all possible to show my appreciation for their hospitality and their respect, affection, moral support, and advice from both of

them.

It was at that time that I received an offer to work as a governess for children and to live with the Polish family, but Rufin suggested waiting until I could find something about my husband. "If he is in Germany," he said, "sooner or later he will write to Giulio. Be patient."

And Lidia told me, "In May we will be going on a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Czestochowa. You shall come with us and pray Virgin Mary to help you find out what happened to him."

I agreed to go with them hoping that my prayers would indeed help me either to find out something about my husband or to help me cope with the unknown.

At the end of April, 1946 I wrote a reply<sup>1</sup> to the last two letters from my children dated April 3 and April 6 which I received very quickly on April 26. I was very happy to be informed about their life and told them, "If the distance in kilometers separates us, we remove it by letters being on time."

The health of the baby always worried me. Although Lala was writing that it was going better now, I felt it was my duty to give her my advice, "You should pay attention to the eyes and ears, maybe it is scrofula, and one needs to give her cod liver oil and the fruits." I wanted to know what Lia was already eating, if she was already drinking wine. I worried that little girl was probably without needed nutrition that comes from mother's milk. And I expressed my doubts that powdered milk was sufficient for growing up well and healthy.

I was glad that Lala described in details Lia's appearance. Looking at her photo now I was able to imagine her, but it was still not enough for me. I wanted to know more, about her hair, if it was black; if the forehead was large like Giulio's; and if her smile was like Giulio's as I remember it; and in what language Lala speaks to her. I said that everything about Lia infinitely interests me and she always should write all the details of her life.

In our apartment house above the room where I sleep there was also a baby. And I wrote to Lala that when during the night and in the morning I can hear him crying I always think about the little Lia and imagine that her mother takes her in her arms and walks with her in the room.

I wrote that I was worrying how long I may remain at Rufin's home and was guessing that my departure could be very long time from now. I wondered about the time when they will tell me that it is enough. After all, it is not so pleasant to have with you one person who has nothing to do with your family.

However, I reassured my daughter that until now every thing is going well, because I work exclusively for the whole family; to give us the possibility to live, and to live well—to have butter, lard, meat and all other products. "But what will be after?" I asked. "This 'after' makes me think very much about my future. If, for instance, I would be able to make something for my departure to join you, then there is the question about your apartment that I understand well."

I mentioned that I was also thinking to find another work, but for my age it was difficult. Therefore, it remained for me only to wait and to have patience, and of the last one I possessed a lot.

I felt that the essential thing at that time was that my children are already in the home, but I suggested that their task now was to look for an apartment, to extricate

themselves from the family. This was their need. "Dear Giulio," I wrote, "excuse me that I am giving you advice, for you it is better to see how it should be done, but it is the right of the parents to give an advice to their children. Isn't it?"

I informed Lala that I found for her all the books that she asked me for, but to mail them was impossible. Therefore, today I decided to send the Dictionary through one Italian that I described before.

I asked my daughter how did they celebrated Easter and described that we had everything that is required by the tradition: hem, meat, butter, cake, wine, and also candies. We had company and made photos of the three of us and me alone. On Easter morning I went to the church. It was very solemn, and they were singing very good 'Alleluia.'

Oh, yes, I told her that I would like also to know if they have baptized Lia, because until now they didn't write anything about it.

I also told her to write what she needs and I would send it to her, if I find an occasion through someone going to Italy.

After writing this letter I decided to wait for the answers from my daughter and maybe from Giulio. I was in a good mood. After Easter, everything was going well. Spring had arrived, the sun was warming up, and in my work at the market all the problems of the winter were already forgotten.

In May, Lidia and Rufin were planning to have a pilgrimage to the sanctuary in Czestochowa and I was invited to join them.

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1. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, April 29, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## Praying For A Miracle

**As remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**  
**Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro**

On May 10, 1946 we got up very early in the morning to catch the first train going in the direction of Czestochowa. Rufin and Lidia, who had made this pilgrimage for many years, knew all the details about the sanctuary. During our trip they recounted to me its story.

The old monastery was located about a hundred miles by rail from Katowice. As we boarded the early train, it was already packed with pilgrims and many of them were handicapped and sick. Lidia explained that everybody was anxious to arrive early at the old monastery to find a place close to the wall where the picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa was shown to the believers.

The ancient fortified Monastery of Czestochowa<sup>1</sup> was located on the slope of the hill called Yasna Gora, and to reach it from the railroad station we had to walk up the hill on a wide path. Along the path were many small shrines of wood or stone. These shrines were composed of pillars and on top of them were placed statues of the Virgin Mary or the crosses. There, the tired pilgrims would stop to rest and to pray. As we slowly walked up, we also had to rest several times.

It was a clear and bright spring morning, making our trip more enjoyable. On our way up, Rufin told me that the picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa was an antique Catholic shrine in Poland dating back to the Middle Ages and the Monastery was a very famous place of pilgrimage for devout Polish Catholics and those seeking a miracle to heal afflictions of their bodies or souls.

As we entered the Monastery we could only hear the hollow hum of the human voices, because it took a while for our eyes to get used to the darkness inside and to see that there was already a multitude of people who occupied the best places near the dark wall. Some were standing with or without the help of canes or crutches, others were sitting on the old wheelchairs or on the primitive wooden carts, and some were lying on the handheld stretchers placed on the floor.

As I observed this pitiable collection of people, I could see some of them and the others I could only guess their afflictions. Some were blind, others were lame, some had missing or mutilated limbs, or were crippled or maimed in various parts of the body, and still others were obviously very sick and moaned in great pain. But all waited patiently for the miraculous Black Madonna to appear on the big wall.

After a while our eyes adjusted to the faint light filtering through the small high windows, and I saw that the walls were covered by gold and silver miniature replicas of arms, legs and other parts of the human body. Rufin explained that they were gifts from crippled pilgrims to remain there as testimony, or as relics, for their miraculous healing.

Finally, a diffused light illuminated the dark wall and the image of the Black Madonna slowly began to appear in one spot. Those pilgrims who were able knelt on the cold stone floor, and all began to pray for the miracles they came to ask to be healed from, their afflictions, illnesses, handicaps, or whatever else they hoped that the Virgin Mary would help them with.

Lidia and Rufin were praying fervently for a miracle to have a baby. I was praying to help my daughter and Giulio to be successful in finding an apartment and implored for a miracle that my husband was alive and was somewhere in a part of Germany occupied by the Americans or English.

We returned from the pilgrimage tired in our bodies, but light in our souls. A desire and hope for a miracle somehow elevated our spirit and we felt liberated from the heavy burden we brought with us to the sanctuary.

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1. Julian Popescu, *Let's Visit Poland* (London: Burke Publishing, Pegasus House, 1984) pp. 79-80.

## **Part Sixteen**

### **Father Is Alive!**



# First Letters From My Father

By Olga Gladky Verro

At the end of April, 1946 Giulio came home for lunch and brought the mail from the mailbox located on the ground floor of the apartment building. One of the letters was from Germany and was addressed to Madam and Monsieur Verro. He guessed that it could be for him and me but then it should have been from Monsieur Demey from France not from Germany. He asked his mother if they had anybody who could write to them from that country.

"Maybe someone who knows your father," she replied.

"Than we better wait for him before opening the letter, Giulio decided. "I don't want him to get upset—it could be addressed to him and you."

So, we impatiently waited for Babbo to arrive home for lunch. He opened the letter and handed it to Giulio saying, "You read it. It's written in foreign language."

And indeed the letter was addressed to Giulio's parents.<sup>1</sup> As Giulio was reading it aloud in French and translating it in Italian for his parents, I screamed, "My father is alive! My father is alive!" and tears poured on my cheeks.

April 11, 1946 [Weinheim]

Honorable Madam and Monsieur Verro,

On January 1945 your son Giulio remained in Laband with my family. Maybe you have some news from your son or maybe he returned home [from Germany]. I implore you, if you have news from him about my family, please let me know as soon as possible because I am very worried about their destiny.

I thank you in advance. With high regards, Orest Gladky.

My address: An Herrn Dmitry Tschiabrischvili, Lindenstrasse, 11  
Weinheim, A.D. Bergstrasse, Germany.

Giulio embraced me and held me close until I calmed down telling me in French, "My dear, if he is in Germany, he was successful in getting away from the Soviets.

"Very good news for you, Lala," said his mother.

"Indeed, the good news," commented his father. Then in his usual authoritative manner added, "If the mail from Germany had started and it took less than two weeks for the letter to arrive here, it means that the times are becoming normal." Then he requested with impatience "Let's eat, I have to go back to work on time."

Since the letter wasn't written in my father's handwriting, Giulio and I guessed about the address and who could be this Dmitry Tschiabrischvili. Also, we wanted to find out how far the town of Weinheim was located from the Soviet occupied part of Germany.

I said, "I will reply right away tonight giving my father the good news about us. But I will be very cautious in giving details about my mother's situation until I know more about my father's circumstances there."

That evening, after we finished the supper and washed the dishes, I felt justified not to join my mother-in-law in the usual evening chores of mending socks. I sat right away to write a letter to my father. It was impossible to describe in the first letter to my father all that happened to us during more than one year since he left us on January 22, 1945 in Laband.<sup>2</sup> I tried to reassure him that we were all in good health and to inform him on the most important events in our lives.

I entrusted the letter to Giulio to mail it in the morning. Regrettably, when Giulio came home for lunch he brought the letter back because the Post Office didn't accept yet mail for Germany. And my letter had to wait to be mailed until May 15 when finally the mail from Italy to Germany was resumed.

April 26, 1946, Turin, Italy

Our dear Father and Grandfather!<sup>3</sup>

I almost died from joy when I received your letter today. We have already lost hope to hear anything about you, but God sees it better. ...You could imagine what day of happiness it was for me, Giulio, and for all Verro's family when we received your letter. Only your little granddaughter Lia couldn't understand why we were so happy.

All the time we were without you in Laband. we were materially provided; we had a roof, a warm place, and food and we worked for our "brothers."

In October 1945 we left Mama [in Poland] and in thirteen days arrived in Turin. On November 12 was born our little daughter Lia. ...Now she is beginning to walk and to mutter her first "Mam-ma." Time flies—on June 12 my little daughter will be seven months old.

Mama is living with a Polish family ...of Giulio's good friend. They respect her and treat her well but she is not a burden for them because Mama knows how to justify her presence. From her letters is clear that she feels good being there, also, her health is fine. We regret that Mama couldn't come with us, because even I obtained with great difficulties the permission to come with my husband. Do you think it would be possible for Mama to meet with you? It would be a real happiness!

Now a little bit about me. We live not too bad. It was good fortune that Giulio received his previous job as soon as he returned home. We are poor but have enough money to feed ourselves and our stomachs are never empty. We live with his family in a crowded but hospitable place—it is hard to find the apartments. But finally we have no worry.

I think that you wouldn't want to have a better husband for me than Giulio. We are happy; and my daughter has a very good father. Mama was very pleased with my husband. How about you?

Now, my dear, about you. From your letter I understood only about the place where you are now. But this is not enough. I will be waiting with impatience all the details of your present, past, and future. Please, write as quickly as possible especially about your health, your situation there, and where is Igoryek?<sup>4</sup>

Antonina Yulyevna with children and Babushka departed "home" in October. Until the last moment all were in good health and not hungry. [Igor's son] Igor is a beautiful baby. ...It's a pity if we couldn't see him anymore.

I will write all the details after I receive your answer. Giulio remembers very well January 22, 1945 and your words, "Take care of Lyalya."

We are mailing you our Easter photo. In the future you will receive more. Mama took care of this and before our departure compelled Giulio to buy a camera.

The whole [Verro] family sends you their warm-hearted greetings. Your granddaughter who has a temperature with her first teeth sends you her "Ciao!" and kisses her "Dyed" Orest. Giulio and I embrace and kiss you dearly. We are waiting impatiently news from you. Yours Lyal'ka.<sup>5</sup> "Beacoups de salut et un grand bais."<sup>6</sup> Giulio."

P.S. May 14, 1946. Finally, I am able to send you the answer with the first mail [from Italy] to Germany. I hope that now mail with Germany will be stabilized and we will be able to be close with our souls and minds. Yesterday I received a letter from Mama mailed on April 1. Everything is well with her. I will mail your address to her immediately.

Days and weeks were passing by without answer from my father and I was not sure if the mail with Germany was going smoothly and that all the letters were arriving at their destination. Therefore, on June 2, 1946 I mailed the second letter<sup>7</sup> to my father with similar content and explained that I am mailing it just in case he would not receive the first one. I added that I wrote immediately to Mama the news that he is in Germany and mailed her his address.

It was a long waiting for a reply from my father. Each day Giulio was coming for lunch and shaking his head, "No, there is nothing in the mail box." Finally, almost at the end of July Giulio entered the kitchen holding the envelope and embraced me. Finally, it was my father's letter.<sup>8</sup> While everybody was eating lunch, I read the very long letter translating here and there important news, some in French, some in Italian.

June 5, 1946. Wainheim.

My joy, my life, my happiness! Dearest Olya! Good, nice Giulio! My tiny Lia! Can I write?... Where is Mama?... What is happening to her?... My dearest child, I cannot even write. You want the details—I am alive. Today I'm happy! Because you and Mama are alive! But Mama?... Who can guarantee that tomorrow she would be alive? Who will help us to pull her out from the hands of death? You see, my dearest child, only I should pay for all of your sufferings, because it was I who condemned you to this horror... Merciful God, grant you happiness and health and keep the days of your life away from darkness and sorrow, only then would I partially regain my peace.

I have thought about the misfortune that befallen on all of us; I was pursued by imagining your reproaches, your imprecations; I was hearing your last hour shouts; I already saw you covered with blood... And I thought that for my transgressions toward you, as the Cain, I would not find place on this small and crowded earth... Forgive me, my dearest, for I committed toward you and Mama such transgressions that could be expiated only by your forgiveness ensuing from you being finally free and happy.

First of all, you should write me everything about Mama, all that you know,

all that is necessary. You can imagine what I am going through now. I am resurrected. But now how to rescue Mama? Is this possible?

About us, I can say very shortly—Igor is always with me, or better, I am with him since January 22, 1945 when we left Laband. For several days we made up to 35-40 kilometers by foot, always encountering front line. Only in Dresden we felt relatively safe. We passed through Langensaltz, about 40 km after Erfurt, where were Igor's "acquaintances" [a code word for Volksdeutsche], but we couldn't make arrangements to stay in that camp. They [the authorities] wanted to send us "home." Idiots! Only in Dresden we were able to convince those idiots that they are crazy and remained there.

In February we were moved to a small town of Waldheim, about 40 km from Chemnitz. There we were stationed in a camp until the arrival of Soviets. With great difficulty we broke free and accomplished 1600 km march: to Fald, Koblenz, then returned to Frankfurt; went up north to Gessen, and from there back south to Augsburg; and then, to Mannheim; from there about 20-25 km to the home of my friend Tschibrischvili who lives in Weinheim.

On September 14, 1945 we got into a DP (Displaced Persons), camp of forcefully deported. There we lived through various frightful experiences with the Soviets that thank to God, concluded safely. Here I didn't hide anything, as I had to do in Germany before. It was too bad that I had to declare that all my documents were perished during the bombardment and birth certificate from Stanislavov or Sosnovice weren't saved. Now I have received some kind of DP documents in which I am listed: Polish (Stateless).[Giulio and I understood that he had to change his true identity to prevent being deported back "home".]

We live with uncertainty. There are rumors that in our UNRRA (an international organization that takes care of the forcefully deported who couldn't return to their fatherland) there is a disposition about sending us to England or South America. They say that in general DPs (that's us) will not remain in Germany during this winter. But our ordeal is not yet over—that's my conclusion. Trouble could yet arrive unexpectedly because not only the UNRRA cares about us, but also "our dear Father" [Stalin] who does everything possible to return all of us "home" to our mother country.

I suffer, of course, because we, the Ukrainians, have lost everything: Poland is resettling us behind River Bug and we don't want to go to the Soviets. We have lost our homeland. But Igor is very calm.

In the beginning of our residency in the camp we were working transporting firewood to the camp—I did it for a short time because I couldn't physically do it after our long journey (from 1,600 km we made by foot 1,000 and 600 by train). After that, until February 1946 we did nothing; and from February until now I work in our Ukrainian labor office. Igor is also working in the housing office. We are clothed, fed, and Igor and I have a room (we can say two, because the other one is empty).

Here I encountered Pyotr Pyetrovich and Valentina Alexandrovna Styepanov<sup>9</sup> with their little Yulya. They say that they received your letter in Leipzig, but they soon were bombarded and lost everything, our address was also lost. I visit them often. Of course, they were very happy that I have found you and they

send you their heartfelt and sincere greetings.

In search for you I wrote to France and Switzerland, but until now there is no answer. I am not giving you my camp address because they [the authorities] constantly are telling us about our departure. The address of my dear friend, Dmitry Zakharovich Tschibrishvili, is for now stable. He, D.Z., is Georgian, a lawyer from St. Petersburg. He knew Lenin, Stalin, Trotzky, and others and he fought for the liberation of Georgia. He is an old immigrant from Russia and loves us Ukrainians. He is already 67 years old, but he looks young. Compared to him, I am an old man.

He read your letter before bringing it to me and shed a tear. He said that if the news had something unpleasant or bad, he would have destroyed the letter—it would have been better [for me] not to know it than to hear something terrible. He is also writing you asking to search for his compatriots. Maybe with the help of Giulio you can help him. D.Z. lives here with his wife; his daughter lives in Heidelberg with a child; his son is in the French Army. Until now they were not able to find their son notwithstanding that he supposed to search for them through the Red Cross.

Tell me, my dear child, are you tranquil about Mama? You have a wise mind, but please be also truthful and write me everything what you can. My life is in the unknown, my destiny - in time and space. Is it possible to get Mama out from there? My dear friend, D.Z., says that in one year we will be all together. But what you can tell me?

You know, you and Mama proved to be more farsighted than I. Before the war I was foreseeing better, but than I became blinded, and the concentration camp [in Makhyevka] completely knocked me out the track, I ceased to be a [thinking] person. Only now I am beginning to get normal and to have a purpose in life after knowing that you, my happiness, are alive, knowing that Mama, my joy, is alive! God, preserve you for many years. God, grant us to see each other again!

Now about Giulio, dear, good young man, my son, who with his love not only saved both of you, but also got you out of danger. There is no limit to my joy. We often talked with Mama and I always had faith in his decency, his honesty, and his nobility.

Yes, I wasn't wrong. By loving you, in the crucial moment he choose to remain with you and he saved you, maybe risking his life, personal well-being, and his future. I believe that you are happy now and hope that your happiness will never leave you. God grant him health, as well as to you; God grant both of you happiness. My benediction will be with you always.

If they would send us somewhere, I will depart with an idea that, if there will be better place than where you are now and if it would be possible, to make you also come there later. But how this could be done with Mama? My dear child, how to get her out of there? Write me also about you. How you are formally documented and if you feel secure? Is everything all right? Write on the address of D.Z. because I don't know what is waiting for us tomorrow.

As soon as D.Z. received your letter, he immediately darted off, got on an electric train and in a half-hour delivered it to me. Now I am writing you in his home. Tomorrow morning I will be riding with him to Heidelberg to share with his

family my great joy.

I hope, my dear daughter, that one day I also will be able to dandle my granddaughter. Please, look after her, cherish her, and bring her up even better than Mama and I brought you up. Alas! In our times we couldn't give you the most important thing, serenity. All things considered, you became a wonderful, good girl. Try not to make your little girl as nervous as all of us are.

I am mailing you my photograph—I am a real *Dyed* [an old man]. Do not expect my answer or a letter soon (maybe they will move us again somewhere). Be careful and watch your health, take care of Lia. Affectionate and tender kisses to all of you, my closest and dearest, my loved ones. I embrace affectionately you, Giulio, and Lia. And I am waiting impatiently the news about Mama. For God's sake, please write the truth about her. Papa.

P.S.: June 6, 1946. D.Z. tells me that I lost two [people] and found four. Yes, thanks to God. This Sunday I will pray to thank Him for having saved you.

I have plenty of free time and have written three plays and am finishing the other two, but there is no sense to publish them here because money here are worthless now or could be in the future. In the next letter I will write you some excerpts from my personal notes—my thinking about your destiny—you will understand in what kind of condition I was before. Now my whole world got upside-down. I want to ask you about so many things, would like to write so much to you, but it's impossible to do it all at once.

Once more I embrace you and kiss all of you tenderly. If you live with Giulio's parents, don't forget to shake their hands from me and give them my regards. How they accepted you? Papa.

Inserted with my father's letter was a short note from his friend Dmitry Tschiabrischvili:

June 5, 1946 [Weinheim]

Dearest Young Mother, one has to be a great painter to draw a picture of me and mainly of your birded father when I gave him your letter. One had to be a great writer to describe what happened to your dear, sweet father. I can only tell that there is only one holiday in the year when one tells to the other, "Khristos Vosces!" But your grieving father didn't rejoice Easter, he was a walking corps. Now I shout: "Orest vosces!" And it was you, dear young mother and loving daughter, who made it happen.

Now to calm his heart he needs only the letter from your mother. At the same time there is also a resurrection for me—I am Georgian—here are living all kinds of nationalities—but I am one lonely Georgian remaining here because all Georgians have been transferred to Italy—probably not very far from you. It isn't home for me notwithstanding that I am an old, old immigrant—it is already 24 years that I left my homeland Georgia.

Tomorrow I am driving your father to Heidelberg to see my granddaughter who is as little as your Lia. Be well, with all dears to your heart. Dmitry Tschiabrischvili.

P.S. from Orest: "Olen'ka, try to decipher his handwriting—and this man is

writing books! Papa.”

In a few days after the first letter, we received the second letter<sup>10</sup> that he probably wrote just in case we didn't received the first one. I assumed this because there were many repetitions especially the questions about Mama and how to get her out of harms way from the Soviets, out of Poland.

June 9, 1946. Wainheim.

My darling daughter, my good Giulio, my tiny granddaughter! I congratulate you with a holiday—today is Trinity.

First of all, how is Mama? How she is feeling being alone? I can imagine it myself... If it were possible to get her out of there I would regain my peace. You know, there are people who are still coming here from out there. It is difficult but until now is possible. Could it be possible for her to write directly to me or it is not safe? I think that Mama would consider this herself. Maybe it would be better to correspond with her through you? You should think about it, too. You, my two wise women, you know it better.

Dear child, you are asking details about me, about my wonderings. It was very beautiful, very tiring, and very sorrowful, because you were not with me, because I didn't know anything about your fate.

After arriving here I got acquainted with some people and with a clergyman of a local Orthodox church. Already in February I have mailed search letters to Italy, Switzerland, and France. After that, I repeated the mailings of the letters through French Red Cross where a daughter of that old immigrant on whose address you are writing was working. Finally, on April 1, 1946, when the mail from Germany was finally permitted, I mailed it for the third time. Thank God, Italy replied. The other sources are still silent.

What I was thinking about your fate? On the day I had received your letter, I wrote in my notebook: “May 6, 1946. Would it be some day when I would find my dear ones, my loved and cherished?... Only God knows...” And on May 4: “My hearth is bathed in blood at the thought of all the horrors that you, my dear ones, must endure! How I left you?! How I dared?..”

And on April 17 I wrote: “Tonya, physically nearsighted, but farsighted in life, capable to make right diagnosis and prognosis, if you didn't made a mistake also this time, you would be able to find the way in life for yourself and for our daughter. This way was also growing up Olya.

Even if their life was crippled maybe it is still possible for them to live. But, if my saint women both made a mistake?... If Giulio's presence (who remained with them) wouldn't be of help but be harmful? Oh, how many terrible insults have to endure my wife and daughter!

In the end, death and damnation should go not only for those who use violence over their life, but also for me, father and husband! I want to guess, to know the fate of those to whom I am obliged with all my life, with my salvation from the death [escape from the Gestapo concentration camp]. Is it possible that life turned out that in recognition to my saviors I brought them suffering and death? All this is very painful and is incomprehensible even to my brother.”

And on April 12: "...Maybe I am a murderer of my family?.."

That's what my dearest daughter, what I was thinking all the time about you and Mama, that's why the heavy stone was on my heart. Now the joy is darkened only by Mama's fate.

I think that you will clarify many things for me and I would be able to rejoice even more. Write me about how you live.

What you mean by saying that you are "poor"? When I got married Mama and I were poor. But even in those very difficult times we were able to grow "rich." I think that it is difficult to talk now about the future because after the war everything is so shaky and unsteady that it's impossible to guess when our poverty will end. You have now tranquility; this is already richness. I don't have it yet—I am poor.

However, today my material situation is as follows: I am fed, clothed, have a place to stay under the roof, and I have work. What will be tomorrow, I don't know. But I say that God knows all. Would we remain here? Would they move us? Where? When? What is waiting us here? There? In any case, long presence here is absolutely not desirable because of the attention of some "acquaintances" [Soviets]. It is good that I found you and Mama. In case of our departure, we always will be able to re-establish contact. According to the last information, we should be remaining here for about 2-3 months. What happens further? That's so much about my future.

Pyetr Pyetrovich and Velentina Alexandrovna Styepanov whom I am visiting every day are sincerely happy about you. We are talking only about you. But I am completely resurrected; I don't have any more heaviness that was oppressing me every second. The tone of gloom has changed to major key. But I am not yet feeling in an optimistic mood.

How we live with Igor? In the morning I go to work, he is sleeping. I come for lunch – he is not there. After lunch he occasionally comes to read me [German] newspaper. I rest until 2 pm and then return to work until 5 pm. When I come for supper, Igor is not there and I go to bed. It is like this every day.

Today is a holiday and I went to church. At 1:00 pm returned home and did some cleaning and washing clothes. In general, we cannot organize to do our elementary chores together, which is very unpleasant. He is always irritated with me and we almost don't talk. He had sunk into neighbors swamp playing cards. This satisfies him and he is almost living there. God is the judge and we all are sinners. But it's very unpleasant to see him in that dirty swamp.

For me the hours go by very slowly, but the days and months go by quickly. But now I have at least possibility to talk with you. I am sorry that Giulio cannot be a party to conversation! I still remember his [limited French and German]: "Buon Jour, Monsieur!" "Schlafen." "Guten Nacht!" But then I was always very tired and had no strength.

Well, how are you, my little girl? Please, for God's sake, write me more often, don't wait until you receive my letters. You know, European mail now is barely moving. Of course, it is only the beginning. But in any case this may continue for a while. And you have plenty to write; you probably could not finish it all in one year.

Don't forget to search for the Georgians [for my friend D.Z.], if they are somewhere there. By the way, there could be also Lidia Prato<sup>11</sup> and maybe Nikolay with

the family<sup>12</sup>. Yes, I remembered also about Zoya Litvinova. Poor girl, she probably perished because the town where she lived was destroyed in half-hour time and under its rubble perished thirty-two thousand people. But this is only my assumption because she could be in Belgium. It is very hard now to find out.

In the letters to Mama be careful in writing about me. But I don't know anything; therefore I cannot judge about it. Anyway, life has taught us a lot to know how to be cautious.

I heard that many people from Italy go to work in other countries. Doesn't Giulio have any intentions to travel anywhere for work? Of course, it is too bad that you live in the country that lost the war—it will be difficult. However, we don't know anything. I am not clear about anything now and cannot presuppose anything, but I think that if Lord will help me to settle somewhere well, then you could join me. Or maybe the time would come when we all would go back home. However, I don't have much hope that this last possibility could be in the near future.

For now I am worrying only about the fate of Mama. Only if she could have possibility to join me. That would be the best solution. I am asking you very much to write all the details about Mama, about how you lived, how you departed, how you live now. What it means the departure of Antonina Yulyevna [Babushka and children]"home"? Igor and I understand this in our way [that they were deported]. You probably know something about it and can assume much more and with more certainty than we.

Write, my dear child, I am expecting with impatience your letters. How is your little girl? Is she healthy? Write about your life in more details.

I kiss you, Giulio, and Lia affectionately. Take care of yourself and your daughter. Your Father and Grandfather.

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1. Orest M. Gladky, Letter to Giulio's parents, [in French], Weinheim, Germany, April 11, 1946, trans. Olga Gladky Verro, 2004, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

2. See the chapters "The Soviet Army Is Advancing" and "Giulio Comes To Stay With Us."

3. Olga Gladky Verro, Letter to her father, [in Russian], Turin, Italy, April 26, 1946, transl. Olga Gladky Verro, 2004, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

4. Diminutive for Igor [in Russian].

5. Casual for Lyalya [in Russian].

6. Warmest greetings and a big kiss. [in French].

7. Olga Gladky Verro, Letter to her father, [in Russian], Turin, June 2, 1946, transl. Olga Gladky Verro, 2004, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

8. Orest M. Gladky, the first letter to his daughter Olga [in Russian], Weinheim, Germany, June 5, 1946, trans. Olga Gladky Verro, 2004, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

9. Friends we made when we arrived in Germany when we stayed in the Ostarbeitern camp in Dresden. See the chapter "Journey Toward the Unknown."

10. Orest M. Gladky, the second letter to his daughter Olga [in Russian], Weinheim, Germany, June 9, 1946, trans. Olga Gladky Verro, 2004, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

11. Wife of Nikolay Nikolayevich Berezhnoy, son of Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy.

12. Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy, brother of Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky. See the chapters "Germans - Invaders or Liberators," "The War Comes Closer to Home," "The Beginning of the End of Occupation," and "Leaving Our Home."

# First Letters From Uncle Igor

*By Olga Gladky Verro*

My uncle Igor wrote immediately to me,<sup>1</sup> the same day when they my father received my first letter.

June 5, 1946, Wainheim, [Germany]

Good Day, dear Olya!

One hour ago Dmitry Zakharovich Tschibrischwili (our good friend and an old immigrant) arrived from Wainheim and brought your letter. It is hard to describe what happened to Orest... This news brought him an enormous commotion. He didn't had any more hope (to find you alive), but I always thought about you, Mama, and Giulio as being alive and safe.

Instead, I had no hope about my dear ones, to see them alive or to hear about them anything. Please describe in more details how my dear ones lived before their departure "home." How their departure took place? Who or what forced them to depart? What they were thinking about me? What kind of rumors you heard about what was expecting them "home"?

I am happy; it is hard to say to what degree, to know that Tosya, children, and Babushka have survived the most terrible time. But what happened after October 1945? Here my happiness changes to desperation because they are without home, they will be treated there as lepers... And the borders "on the land" will forever divide me from them... Moreover, I cannot be useful to them in anything! Tosya alone, with not very good health and the old Mother... She doesn't have any job training... About the post-war conditions "at home" I can clearly judge by the pre-war conditions...

I left home without even taking a photo of Tosya or of my children. If you have any thing, please send it to me. You can imagine what happiness it would be for me...

I am happy for you! I am happy that Giulio completely justified my opinion about him as a nice, noble man. In Laband I felt for him deep sympathy, and now it had been reinforced even more. I am sorry that I cannot tightly embrace you both (please forgive me, the three of you).

I wish you long lasting and solid as rock happiness for all your life! I wish that you never will see again the horrors that you have lived through and those horrors and misfortune that my family and I had lived and will continue to live.

Rostik will write you in detail about our adventures.

Affectionate kiss to you and your little Lia. Embrace tightly Giulio and kiss him for me! God give you happiness and health! Write to me, I am waiting.

Yours Igor.

The second letter<sup>2</sup> from my uncle Igor probably was written after they received my reply to their letters. It also had a lot of the same questions about his family that he asked in the first letter. But there were some news about him and my father.

June 12, 1946, [Wainheim, Germany]

Dear Olya!

Without waiting for your reply, I am writing you again. (You should do the same!) I don't know if it is possible to describe in detail the life of my dear ones and now so distant Tosya and the children. I am asking you to write as much as possible about them starting from the time of my departure, without withholding anything. You remember that I left Tosya still in bed after the childbirth<sup>3</sup>... How she felt? How soon she recovered? What they had to eat? I left them almost without coal... Did they continue to live in the same apartment?

Rostik<sup>4</sup> and I have endured a lot during this time, but what have endured my loved ones and also you with Mama is probably hard to imagine. You write that all the time until departure "home" they had food and roof. Could this be understood literally?

Poor Tosya! Unfortunate children! Half-orphans! And what is waiting for them where they had departed or taken away? What kind of assumptions Tosya had about me?

What was the faith of ...others (who remained)? I am interested from the point of view of my departure... All my life I will be tormented with the thought that saving my skin I left my family to perish. And this is for the second time... But the first time everything finished all right<sup>5</sup>, but now?... Who can tell me that it will conclude as well this time?

How my little boy was growing up? How Nanochka and Fredik lived all this time? Did they remember me? Didn't they get sick during this time? How often did you see them until departure? Tosya probably got older and became gray-haired.

Would I see them sometimes again? Until now I was trying to get used to the gloom thoughts that they had perished in the first months after our parting... Thank God, I was mistaken in that. But what happened after October of last year? I know that it is futile to ask this question of myself or anybody else to answer. Nobody can answer this, maybe only the time can... But one wants to find some answer to it! This could bring some tranquility...

Outwardly I am holding up. Orest often even accuses me in heartless, stone-like heart, etc. But I try not to let myself go and not to fall into hysterics. But what sometimes is in my soul, how bitter and painful, and depressing it is, should I shout about it on every corner?

Do you think that your mother is out of danger? Is she provided with means for living? I think that Rostik had already asked you about it and you will answer him.

Well, Olya, write often and with details. You know how much your letters mean to Orest and to me. Don't forget also about the photographs of Tosya and children, I think that you may have them. Instead I don't have anything.

Don't forget to search for Maria Alexandrova<sup>6</sup>. You probably have address of her son in Hamburg. I would like to establish correspondence with her. I wrote to Hupe<sup>7</sup> and in January received a reply from him. He is home, alive as well as his family. I am writing a letter to him and will mention about you. I think that he will be happy that you found your happiness.

From the newspapers I have an approximate idea about how you live. About Orest and me from materialistic side there is no need to worry: we are clothed decently and have enough food. We are located in the UNRRA camp in Mannheim.

(Next page was missing).

1. First letter from Uncle Igor to Olga in Italy, June 5, 1946, Wainheim, [Germany].
2. Second letter from Uncle Igor to Olga in Italy, June 5, 1946, Wainheim, [Germany].
3. See the chapter "Giulio Comes to Stay With Us."
4. Nickname for Orest.
5. See the chapter "The Big Thaw" when Igor and Orest had to abandon their families for the first time.
6. My friend from Laband Frau Maria. See the chapter "Meeting the Italian Prisoners of War."
7. German friend and superior of Igor at the *Presswerke* Laband. He helped his brother and his niece to be transferred from Heinkel Aircraft in Oelsnitz to Presswerke Laband as the specialists workers—Orest as a chemist a Olga as a designer. See the chapter "A Letter From Uncle Igor."

## Part Seventeen

Father in Germany

Daughter in Italy

Mother in Poland



# Happy News About My Husband

As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
Translated and Edited by Olga Gladky Verro

After returning from Czestochowa, I was patiently waiting for a letter from my daughter. Indeed, at the end of May I received from her a letter<sup>1</sup> written on April 29, 1946. I could feel from the beginning of the letter that she was in good mood as she described that they had a nice Easter.

...Here the winter is long gone by. Although it rains often, there are also beautiful days. People are wearing already the raincoats and light socks; sometimes for me is already hot. Easter in our family was very jolly. We had a lot of food: broth, boiled meat, sausage, roast, asparagus, spinach, three kinds of cheeses, white bread, and naturally wine (Vermouth and red wine), and we had also fruits (figs, oranges, and nuts).

On the second day of Easter we had an outing on the slopes of the nearby hills. There, up on the beautiful meadow, we had our picnic supper. Lia was also with us, but she had to drink her milk. Naturally, the cost of these festivities was very high. And now we have to make strict economy.

Lia's little head finally healed.<sup>2</sup> Only she has difficulty with her stomach. She doesn't digest milk to well. Therefore, she eats very little each time. She is already drinking from a cup and a glass. She eats very well and likes to taste all kinds of foods. She drinks every day fresh orange and lemon juice diluted in sweet water.

But, nevertheless, she is always vigorous and lively. She sits already very well alone. She knows already well her papa, mama, grandmother, and her milk bottle. She takes pleasure in bathing, going for a walk, and she likes to lick plates, spoons, and meat bones.

Lia is really little, like a doll. When we walk on the street, several times people have asked us, "Is she a doll, or a real little girl?" It is a great pleasure to have her, and we are very proud. She is smart for her age and witty. And how she likes to play! She has already many toys - two rattles, a rabbit, and a penguin. For Easter Lia had worn her first dress and little shoes, both made by me.

Yes, it is already half-a-year we have been here and Lia in two weeks will be six months old. The time is flying fast. But Giul'ka<sup>3</sup> and I are even closer to each other and more in harmony then before.

Mama, Giulio isn't happy you write to him always using the respectful pronoun 'You,'<sup>4</sup> it's time to call him simple 'you.'

For Easter we ordered at the tailor shop a suit for me from the navy blue Cheviot<sup>5</sup> that we brought from home. Now is the new problem, the shoes. But slowly we will get everything.

In May we heard from Bruno<sup>6</sup> that he is getting married. When he found

out that you are staying with Rufin, he asked us to express his greetings to you, to Rufin and his wife.

At this point Lala interrupted writing to take care of Lia and she promised to continue tomorrow. And what a surprise was in the letter she wrote the next day, on April 30, 1946.

Dear Mama, dear Mama! God didn't forget us! Today, with the first mail from Germany to Italy came also a short letter<sup>7</sup> from Papa! He had written in French to the parents of Giulio and is asking them if they have some news about his family.

From his letter I only understood where he is, approximately 200-250 kilometers from the French border, close to the town of Mannheim. This letter was only two weeks in the mail.

But from Italy no mail is going yet to Germany. Too bad, I cannot give him right away an answer. It seems to me that he is working with Allies. You should try writing him. Maybe it is possible to mail it from Poland. But Papa is nearer to me than to you.

What a happiness, Mama! It's like in a dream. I think about how he was disheartened not knowing what happened to us, and I have to write him that he is already a grandfather. Try to write him; his address: "An Herrn Dmitry Tsciabrischwili, Lindenstrasse, 11, Weinheim, A.D. Bergstrasse, Deutschland."

I burst into tears and hurried to tell Lidia and Rufin the news about my husband. "He is alive and safe in the part of Germany occupied by the Allies! He managed to escape from the Soviets!" And we rejoiced together that my husband was alive.

Lidia commented right away, "Didn't I tell you to pray Madonna to help you to find your husband? And she did!"

Rufin was more practical and asked me, "Didn't you hear yet from your German women customers the rumors that German wives and children would be allowed to go to Germany, if their husbands live there?"

"Yes," I answered, "but my husband is not German."

"*Pani*," replied Rufin, "don't be so naive. Today you can buy any kind of documents; all you need is to find the person who can make them to your specifications. If your husband can send such documents to you, I will help you to find here what else need to be done to be allowed to travel to Germany."

"You are such optimist, Rufin," I replied. "But thank you for offering your help. I know that you have good imagination, but it's not so simple to do what you propose." But his idea remained in my head and I couldn't stop thinking how to put it in practice.

The same evening I wrote to my husband a letter in German. First of all, I wrote how happy I was to learn that he was alive and that he managed to reach the right part of Germany.<sup>8</sup> Then I wrote him that from October 1945 Lala lives in Turin, Italy, also in the right part of Europe. That she lives there with her husband Giulio and their six-months-old daughter Lia together with Giulio's parents. That Lala, Giulio, and I write letters to each other. And that today I received a letter from Lala with the news that Giulio's parents received his letter, in which he is asking them about his family.

I explained that Lala couldn't answer him right away, because the mail is not going yet from Italy to Germany. Therefore, she asked me to write him from Poland, where I live with the Polish family of Giulio's good friend. And I added that I was the only one in our family who remained on the wrong side<sup>9</sup> of Europe.

However, I heard rumors that wives and children of the German men would be allowed to leave Poland to join their husbands and fathers in Germany. For this they need to have official documents stating that their husbands are German, living now in Germany, their address, and place where they work.

I asked my husband if he could obtain such official documents about himself and, if he could, to mail them to me as soon as possible. I emphasized that, if I have such documents, I could try, with the help of my good friends here, to get on the train and join him. I concluded by repeating that I hoped he understands that in order to be valid to cross the border from Poland to Germany these documents must state that he is German, his address, and a certificate from his place of work.

I mailed this letter the next day hoping that my husband could make the required documents soon and mail them to me on time because there will be many German women and children traveling from Poland to Germany. I thought that I would be less noticeable in the crowd then traveling later with fewer of them.

Shortly after that, I received a letter from France from Monsieur Demey; he also wrote my husband's address. Rufin suggested to me, "Write again to your French friend and ask him again if it is possible for him to send you some kind of a certificate stating that you are French." Rufin instructed me and I wrote the exact text of how this document should be written. I explained that this document could help me to join my husband in Germany.

Now I had to wait for my husband's and Monsieur Demey's answers. I really didn't much believe that this bizarre scheme could work, but Rufin was convinced that this was the best opportunity for me to cross the German border.

And Lidia told me again, "You see, *Pani*, the Virgin Mary of Czestochowa heard your prayer. She is opening for you the road to join your husband."

Right away I wrote a letter<sup>10</sup> to my daughter and Giulio.

May 29, 1946 [Michalkowice, Poland]

My dearest children, I am finally writing an answer to your last letter. ...The news about Papa was a great joy and a big surprise because I had no hope to receive news about him. Luckily the mail from here is already going to Germany and I wrote him the next day. I described to him some details of your life and mine. I explained that he couldn't receive the letters from you yet, but that you are receiving his letters. Lala, could you send his letter to me?

...About me, there are no changes, except one. It was the occasion to have a work in the home of an artist, as a domestic and to look after the baby. But Rufin didn't recommend it, he advised me to remain a little longer with them to wait for the answer from Papa. You know that the news about Papa had changed my plans. Before, I didn't have any other goal but seeing you. Now I think that I would also be useful for him, maybe to maintain his health. You know, Lala, that his health was not good.

In Rufin's family there are no changes, there are no babies and this is

always their only sorrow. [Every year they make pilgrimage to holy places to pray for a miracle.] On May 10, we were at Czestochowa to pray to the Saint Mary of Czestochowa. It was very magnificent over there. I prayed for all my dear ones [and for the salvation of Papa.] I bought one little image of Saint Mary for Lia. I keep it always with me together with her photo. Now Lia is the most precious person for me in the whole world. Would I be able to see her sometime? I send to Lia endless kisses and hugs.

I wrote that “the last photo of Lia delighted me very much and” now I can represent her well. It seemed to me that she resembled her grandfather when he was small. And I was sure that “for her age she has a very intelligent face, especially her eyes. In general, she looks very nice and so little, my God, so little.” I wanted them to write all details about her health and development. “Is she still very vigorous? How much she weighs? Are you taking good care of her? You need to weigh her every day.” I was worrying about her health and what was wrong with her stomach.

I have found all the books that Lala asked me and I mailed her the second dictionary and asked her if she received the first one, also to write me what else she needs.

As I waited for answers from my husband and from Monsieur Demey, I kept in touch with my customers, the German women, especially with those who were planning to join their husbands in Germany. From them I learned that reunification registration of German wives and families was done through the Catholic Church.

Rufin immediately went to his parish priest to find out what documents were needed and how it could be done to include me in this group. The priest promised to inquire from his superiors about it. Soon after, he told Rufin that this operation was still in the process of organization and it would take some time before the convoy train with the German families would depart for Germany. Meanwhile he suggested I wait to receive from my husband the documents I had requested and not to worry that the mail is slow—all German women were also waiting.

After this, a hope to join my husband was high one day and then the next day I imagined all kinds of obstacles and was losing my hope, especially because for a long time there were no letters from my husband. One thing that put me in a good mood was that letters from Italy were beginning to take less time to arrive. The last letter<sup>10</sup> from Lala I received in a record time of two weeks. She wrote again in German:

May 28, 1946. Turin [Italy]

Our dearest Mama! Dear Rufin and Lidia! Finally, I am a little bit freer and able to write a couple of words to you. Between May 5 and 12, we had a real ‘bazaar’ in our apartment. Giulio and Domenico installed a new electric fixture in the kitchen and painted the walls. After that we cleaned up everything in the apartment, washed clothes, and stored all winter clothing. The little one was very restless during all this confusion. We all were very nervous and moody.

On May 12, the guests arrived, Giulio’s mother’s aunt and sister. At our place only the sister stayed, aunt was with other relatives. But the hardest days were only until May 21. After that, there was again much to wash, mend, and iron, because during the previous week we did not wash, except the diapers. Naturally,

taking care of Lia I had an excuse to choose my chores.

Last week I mailed a letter to Papa. Now is already possible to write to Germany. How I am waiting for his answer! Hopefully, everything is all right with him. Mama, have you written to him?

Lia is already weighing 6,200 grams. Now she has a little bit of cold. She remains always small, vigorous and quick, but not fat. She calls already 'mam-ma' when she is wet or hungry. For more then a month I am giving her a pap made from flour roasted in the oven, or rice flour, or cream of wheat, or a soup of vegetables. She drinks the orange, lemon, and carrot juices. Last night she slept well the whole night. She recognizes all of us. And she is already a sly little fox and commands us all. But she is very vigorous and lively.

The last time I wrote you, I said that I was not happy about the problem with her stomach. She doesn't digest very well the milk. She always had this problem. She sits already well by herself and can stand up when I hold her little hand. And she begins already to walk. And how proudly she does it! I am hoping that she will love music since she stops complaining when one sings to her. Every time when she goes to sleep, one has to sing and walk holding her in one's arms. Giulio's turn is in the evening. The best amusement for her is to go outside for a walk. She looks everywhere, at the streetcar, people, and bicycles.

We would be happy when you could see your granddaughter. Here the whole family is crazy for her. When there is a nice sunny day she does not miss to be on the balcony. Every Sunday and on holidays we are going in the afternoon for a walk.

The City is very big and still beautiful, but many big buildings were destroyed by the bombardments. Almost all trees were broken the last winter and nothing remained on the streets from their beauty. To justify that people used the trees to heat their homes, they say here, "The cold (weather) is not an aunt who can warm you in her arms." And now everywhere the streets are naked. On one side of the town are the Alps Mountains, on the other side are the hills. But I have very little time to take a walk to see everything.

On May 25 Bruno got married. Too bad, they cannot come to see us, because he is attending technical school.

Mama, the seamstress made for me a new blouse and a dress from the silk with overall flowers design that we bought before our departure on the market in Katowice. Also the tailor made for me a suit from a cut for Papa's suit of navy Cheviot that we brought from home. For now I am wearing Giulio mother's shoes. If you can, send me number 36 and half [because] with the shoes there is a problem But we don't have shortage of food.

If I will be able to get a good job, in two-three years we would be able to get many things that we need for our home. We were lucky that Giulio was able to get his old job back; his pay is higher then in the other establishments.

With impatience I am waiting for news from Papa. I am hoping for the best. I am asking God to help you encounter each other again.

...Giulio was right to be afraid to take me home to his family. His folks are very strange and eccentric, they can see the black as white and the blue as red, and one should not argue with them about it. Well, I am trying to get used to them

and hopefully they would try to get used to me...

...It is hard for me to write well in German, but I am hoping later to be able to write finally in R.<sup>11</sup> Now that I am learning Italian, I am quickly forgetting German. The most important is that you can understand the meaning of what I am writing about. Also, I am writing always at night almost falling asleep at the table.

It is already one month that I have my hands and wrists swollen from a flair-up of rheumatism.<sup>12</sup> It was good not to do some of the housework to help them to heal. But the new work that takes time to do is coming; I must prepare everything for the winter for the little one, the warm dresses, stockings, and the coat. We have already looked how much it will cost and everything is very expensive. And the next month I will begin visits to the dentist, I must find time to do it.

...But you know Giulio, when he has couple of liras in his pocket, he makes happy his Lala, he buys me something sweet. By the way, we are eating already the first cherries and strawberries. Very expensive!

...How is your stomach, Mama? How is your work?

Mama, write me more often, it seems to me that you have little bit more free time then I. And what a joy for me to receive your letters and to know that everything is fine with you. And especially I am interested to know about our 'cousins'.<sup>13</sup> Please write, write. Giulio will write to you soon.

The whole family Verro is sending cordial greetings to you, Rufin, and Pani Lidia. Lia is sending her Ciao and kisses. And we are kissing you with love. Yours Lala, Lia, and Giulio. Also, our greetings to Pietrowski family.

In the late spring of 1946, Lidia's mother got very sick and had to be placed in a hospital in Zabrze where she remained for several weeks. I was finding on the market the food that she could eat and Lidia was bringing it to the hospital; I visited her on Sundays. When she returned home she was convalescent for a long time. The whole family was deeply concerned about the poor health of their beloved mother. I was also very sorry to see her health declining. In the few months I knew her, I became very fond of this gentle and warm woman who accepted me as a part of her family.

On the market I met one Italian by the name of Giuseppe who told me that he will be leaving soon for Italy and I asked him if he would be willing to take a small package for Lala to Turin. He agreed without hesitation. I was so happy that I found the way to send the shoes for her and Lia and some fabric to make dresses. Also the books: a dictionary, a grammar, and Giulio's book. I wrote a letter<sup>14</sup> on June 26, 1946 and immediately mailed it with the airmail notifying Lala about this possibility. "In the beginning of July will be departing another convoy train of Italians. I am sending you a small package with shoes for Lia and for you by one Italian from Turin. ...I am afraid to mail you many and better items, because I don't believe too much you will receive it."

I was unhappy about Lia's health and wrote to Lala: "I think that you are not taking good care of her. Judging from the photo, she is so skinny. ...What she has with her stomach? ... I assume that you are already cooking for her vegetable soup? ...Maybe you remember how I made it for Talyk.<sup>15</sup>"

"On the last photo she looks very gracious, very pretty and her face looks very

foxy. I look at her every day and talk to her. I would like very much to have much larger photo, so I could see all the traits of her face more distinctly."

I was also worrying about my daughter's health. Why her hands, are still swollen. "In every letter you are writing about washing clothes. Maybe, it's because you keep them too much in cold water. ...Make very serious effort not to do it and soak the hands in warm salty water before going to sleep."

From a few letters that I received so far from Lala I had the impression that not everything was going so smoothly in the family as she wrote it in the beginning. So, I gave her my advice on this matter:

I am worrying a little that you write about the eccentricity of Giulio's parents. What exactly you mean by that? All people have their own special habits, their own opinions; it is very natural and normal. They will be always looking at you as not their own. But everything will depend on you. Until you live with them, you cannot meddle in the other castle with your rules. And I am afraid that with your character it will be very difficult. You should not make any contradictions, any objections. You should obey everything that the elders want, because they are teaching you. It is the common sense how you should learn now.

That's the shape that your life is taking and, I would say, that it is not too bad compared to what it could have been. Of course, I don't know all the details of their originality, but I am asking you to be more compromising and not to show your own originality too.

I complained that it is already more than a month gone by after I mailed two letters to Papa, but there is no answer yet; that I still have not much hope to see him and cannot imagine how it could happen. "It seems that it is as impossible as the encounter with you." Then sometimes I think that my future shall depend on his letter with the information I asked to mail me about him working in Germany. "I would like to be able to join him, because I don't have hope to be with you."

About my health, it is "as usual, my stomach sometimes is hurting and sometimes not."

"My work from one day to another is becoming more and more difficult. There is not much merchandise on the market, everything is very expensive and there are very few customers for the expensive items, but I make all possible to have a profit, as they say until the last moment. And ...another work I was offered ...was postponed until the last moment when all the other possibilities [about joining Papa] would be exhausted."

At the end of the letter I notified them about Rufin's family mournful news. His mother died from the heart attack; she was gone in fifteen minutes. Rufin grieved very much. The funerals were very solemn. Also about Lidia's mother who is sick with the stomach.

The next day, early in the morning, I hurried to the station in Katowice to give the package to the Italian by the name Giuseppe who was departing with a convoy train repatriating ex-prisoners. He gave me his address and told me that he will notify my daughter when he arrives in Turin.

Just to be sure that at least one of the letters would arrive notifying my daughter about the package, The next day I mailed a postcard<sup>16</sup> and one more letter<sup>17</sup> on June 28,

1946. I wrote that I was sending a small package by Giuseppe Santifero, who is returning home in Turin in Via Roma, 35. That Giuseppe was "my acquaintance at the market and will also tell you about my life and my work"

I apologized for such a modest package, but stated that I was afraid that it will not arrive there. And I suggested that maybe it was possible for Giulio to come here and to take some of the things that I could find here on the market.

Rufin asked me to write the news for Giulio that *Herr Kamionka*,<sup>18</sup> is alive, he encountered him in one camp.

For some reason right from the beginning I had a presentiment that the package I was sending by Giuseppe would never get in the hands of my daughter. But I was willing to take a risk because I knew how my daughter needed shoes.

One thing that I didn't mention yet to my daughter and Giulio, was about a remote hope for my departure to Germany with the German families. I had in me the strongly ingrained popular belief that one should not talk about the good things that one wishes to happen, because it might bring "bad luck." Therefore, I refrained from mentioning it to keep the "bad luck" away from this unbelievable idea, which had one chance in a million to succeed and which only Rufin and Lidia believed achievable.

About one month after I received the last letter from Lala I received a long letter<sup>19</sup> from Giulio written in French:

June 24, 1946

Our dear Maman! This time it's me who is writing you, because Lala has very little time and also she has to write to Papa. It is two days as we received a long letter from Papa and Igor. They are still together and both are in good health. The first thing that he is asking us is about you, because in our first letter we didn't specify your present situation. He is asking where are you and, if it is possible to find you, how to do it. It would have been better to send his letter to you, but he did write a little bit too much.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we thought that it was better to write you the most important things with hope that during this time you will also receive his letter.

Papa writes that after they had left us in Laband,<sup>21</sup> they saved themselves by escaping to Dresden, where they worked until the front came too close and they had to run south, and then north, and again south, all by foot for 1,600 kilometers and again for 1,000 kilometers. At the end they found the Americans.

Right now they are in a camp for the foreigners, but they are free. As they write, they live well without needing anything; they were also given clothing as the old one was all worn out. Both are working in the camp's office, but in general, all other persons like them are without active work and they believe that it will be difficult to remain in Germany. People talk that before winter they shall depart either to South America or to England.

We have asked him to send you some documents of the American authority that certify his position there. And we believe that with this document it could be possible for you to try the road through the consulate in Katowice. Naturally, it is only our suggestion, we don't know if it could be realized. We believe that maybe it will be better that you accept the position of the governess and wait to see what will be possible to do later.

I cannot tell what surprise and joy Papa had by finding out about our marriage and our departure to Italy. He will write you about it. Between all this cheerful news only Igor is sad, because he doesn't have hope to embrace his little ones. He is asking, if we have their photo. Maybe you have them? He is asking all the news about them, but it is sad for us to write, because we know that he will be unhappy to hear them.

Lia has grown well, she is not fat, but she is very strong in her constitution, she is already standing up near her small chair and she holds herself only with one hand. She has an intelligent gaze in her eyes; every little thing is interesting to her. When we are going for a walk she is turning her head in all directions. In the streetcar she wants to remain in front, so she can see everything.

Now we are already giving her a light vegetable soup, cream of wheat with milk, and another soup made with the flour and milk. Naturally, we also give her all kinds of fruits, oranges, peaches, apricots, and also carrots and tomatoes. Is it all right like that for the vitamins? We are trying to give her the best and in this thing we don't make economy. But unfortunately now the little one has a whooping cough. We have brought her to the doctor, who prescribed her some medicine to calm her cough. But she supports her illness very well. She eats well every day and she didn't lose any weight. She is sending a big kiss to her grandmother.

Maman, you are asking me how it goes for me with Lala, if my idol didn't fall from the pedestal yet. No! She is always on top, but... Sometimes there is some small dispute with my mother, both have very hard heads and then Giulio had to make feel them better, a little bit one and then another, until all is past. But these are small passing clouds and the sun is returning quickly with the peace.

We have thought that later Lala should go to school for seamstresses, so it will be useful for her, for the little one, and maybe also with my mother to make some work.

Lala likes Italy. Here in Turin there are the hills with the woods and sometimes we go there to collect flowers and Lala is very happy of this promenade. Naturally, we don't have much money to spend for the amusements, but we go sometimes to the movies, or to downtown to buy ice cream; but the important thing for us is to remain together and close with our little one.

To answer your question to Lala about what she needs. She is saying that here in Turin one finds everything one wants. Naturally, one needs lots of money. Therefore, it will be better that you buy only one thing but very good one, and after when it will be possible you could send it to her.

Our dear Maman, we also remember the time when we were together and when during difficult times we were happy. And we know how much it was your merit; we always hope to embrace you and now, also Papa.

You need to say to Rufin to have patience, because we don't have yet an apartment. That's why it is impossible at this moment to invite him and Madam Lidia to come to Italy. But we have not forgotten them and we would have also a great pleasure to see them again. Give them our regards.

To you we all send our kisses and the regards of my parents. Lia, Lala, and Giulio.

P.S. Today it is very hot here, 48° C in the sun and 28° C in the apartment.  
Lala had liquefied!

Giulio's letter brought much news about my husband and his brother, about Lia, Lala, and Giulio. It gave me a piece of mind about them, but I was concerned about the problems between Lala and her mother-in-law. I decided that in my next letter I would scold my daughter for her character and would suggest her to be more tolerant while living in the home of Giulio's parents.

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1. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in German] Turin Italy, April 29, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
2. From the exema. See the chapter "Birth of Our Daughter Lia."
3. Russianized form of a diminutive name for Giulio.
4. The respectable form of "You" spelled with the capital letter, as used in many languages.
5. The all wool fabric in twill weave used for suits.
6. Bruno Zanobini, Giulio's friend. See the chapter "Italian Armistice."
7. Orest M. Gladky, letter to Giulio's parents [in French] Mannheim, Germany, April 11, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
8. Not occupied by the Soviet Army.
9. Part of Europe occupied by the Soviet Army.
9. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter [in French] Michalkowice, Poland. May 29, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
10. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in German] Turin, Italy. May 28, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
11. 'R' stands for Russian because we were afraid to write the full name in case the letter gets in the Soviet's hands.
12. The commonly used name for arthritis in Italy.
13. Our code name for the Soviets.
14. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky. letter to her daughter [in Russian] Michalkowice, Poland. June 26, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
15. The little son of Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnaya, a sister of Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky. See the chapters "My Childhood In the Hamlet of Snyezhnoye" and "Scarlet Fever and Diphtheria Outbreak."
16. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, postcard to her daughter [in French] Michalkowice, Poland. June 27, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
17. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] Michalkowice, Poland. June 28, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
18. Head of the telephone department and Nazi Party boss at the Presswerke. See the chapter "Presswerke Laband."
19. Giulio Verro, letter to his mother-in-law [in French]. Turin, Italy. June 24, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
20. He wrote things that would be dangerous for his wife if the Soviets could intercept the letter.
21. See chapter "Chance, Destiny or the Will Of God."

## Praying To God and Holy Mary

**Olga Gladky Verro**  
**As Remembered by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**

My future continued to be unknown. There were no letters from my husband, although I wrote to him as soon as I got his address. I was doing my business as usual at the market in Katowice, but it was becoming less and less profitable. However, before, when the business was good, I saved enough money to keep feeding the whole family for some time, unless the inflation would erode the value of zloty.

Because I was worrying so much about my future, one day Lidia said in her sweet voice, "We shall go next week to Piekari<sup>1</sup> to pray the Virgin Mary to help you join your husband."

Rufin replied, "*Pani*, if Lidka says we shall go to Piekari, then we shall go there. There is one church that believers visit frequently to pray."

We had a nice trip to the old town where there were several Catholic churches. Rufin and Lidia told me that one of them was also known in Poland for the Venerate Image of the Virgin Mary. We attended a Mass and prayed for a successful reunion with my husband. On our way home Lidia told me, "*Pani*, now you should have only patience to wait. Holy Mary shall show you the road to follow for joining your husband."

"I hope so, because there's no other solution," I replied.

From Piekary I mailed a postcard<sup>2</sup> to Lala and Giulio with a short message:

August 10, 1946, [Piekari, Poland]

We are sending you greetings from Piekari where we came to pray God and Saint Mary to help us. Rufin is making for me everything, like he made it for you. But for now I need to wait. Maybe I will meet Papa again. We embrace you dearly. Mama.

After our return from the trip, I wrote immediately a letter<sup>3</sup> to my daughter voicing strongly my opinion on the unpleasant situation that developed between her and Giulio's mother:

August 12, 1946, [Michalkowice, Poland]

Good day, my dear children! Finally after waiting for a long time I received Giulio's letter of June 24, which was stamped July 3, 1946.

Praise the Lord that everything in general goes well. But some things I don't like. In particular, first, the health of Lia with whooping cough. Where did she catch it? It is a contagious disease. The best remedy is the change of climate for a few days. In her infancy Lala had this illness, I made this change on time. It made a great effect. Try to make this for Lia.

Second, are the arguments between Lala and Mother-in-law. Now I am ashamed for the upbringings of my daughter. The life is already hard and this makes it even harder. I can't understand the reason for such disputes.

Lala! Some time ago I already wrote that you should be correct, you shouldn't forget that you are in another country, that you are in a society that is completely different in its traditions and customs than in the country you had lived. That's why you should be content and not try to change it. You shouldn't tell me that these are little things. I know well your character, and Giulio knows the traditions of his parents. In the beginning the disputes could be inevitable, but you should put an end to them. I don't want to believe that the mother of your

husband who loves him wants to hurt you, or wants to make bad suggestions to you.

If, for instance, you don't agree with the opinion of your mother in law, you should diplomatically make a compromise as they are doing the grand diplomats. I understand the family is big, the apartment is small, everyone has his nerves, it is very natural, but the peace is better. They say in Russian: 'If it is impossible, than it is only difficult.' Yes, you have seen how I am able to live with people. You should have learned from me. And you should know that it had been always for my advantage.

Now about my future. I don't have any letters from Papa, while I sent him many. Therefore, it is necessary that you write him everything about my life and that he gives you the answer if it is possible for me to join him and what should be done to do it. Also ask him, if for example, I can do something about it, would it be possible for him to accept me. I think the best thing is what you suggested—it gives me more security and hope. Then ask him if he can write a letter for me and send through you a certificate that I asked him to mail me. It will be safer—your letters I receive and from him not.

My life is like always. But lately we had many events. First, there were the funerals of Rufin's mother. This followed by Anniversary of marriage by Pietrowski parents. Then, there was a marriage of Rufin's brother. And now in the project is the marriage of another brother. At this moment Rufin is vacationing in a forest as the instructor in the student's camp. For a month-and-half I was alone in the home, because Lidia was with her sister. The next month she departs with her mother to her grandparents in the country, because her mother is sick. I live very well with all Rufin's and Lidia's relatives; everybody respects me; my joys are their joys and their sorrows are my sorrows, and vice versa.

Yes, you are right about Igor. Write him that Antonina wanted to go to her aunt that lived in Latvia. He could try finding out if they are there. If he has her aunt's address, he should mail it to me. I will attempt to send her a letter; also I could attempt to send a letter to our hometown to have some news about them. It seems to me that one should not loose hope about them. In one year or so, one could make some inquiries with the international Red Cross.

Have you received my package from Giuseppe Sentifero, who lives on Via Roma, 35 in Turin? He should have already arrived in Turin, because he departed from Katowice on July 10. Forgive me that I have sent also some nonessential things, but the main things were the shoes that I had already on hand at the moment of departure. Then I was not sure that you would receive them. I also mailed the books, three of them. I am interested very much if, for example, your father could send you something, would you be able to sell them and buy something else that you need.

I like very much the last photo of Lia. Really, she resembles her grandfather Gladky. When she will be one year old you should make a nice photo in a photo-atelier. She has a very pleasing and intelligent face. But her health worries me.

I am always waiting with impatience your letters. Write as soon as possible the letter to Papa, because I am waiting for his news. Greetings from

Rufin and Lidia and, also from the Pietrowski family. Thousands kisses to Lia. Be in good health. I embrace all of you dearly. Your mother.

P.S. I want to say few words to Giulio for his mother. Ask her to forgive me for the upbringings of my daughter and ask her not to be too severe with Lala. Forward all my respect and my cordial greetings to your parents.

On the third week of August I received Lala's letter<sup>4</sup> written at the end of July. It was written in German:

July 30, 1946

My dear Mama, how long I didn't write to you! I had so much to do! I wanted to show to my mother-in-law that I could sew and embroider. I had made from the white pique a beautiful little dress, the shoes, and a hat for Lia. Naturally, daily I put only one-and-half-hour to work on it, and it took a long time to make it. Then there were the letters to write to Papa and to Uncle Igor.

I received your letter from June 28, 1946. There is no such man by the name of Giuseppe living in Via Roma, 35. It is too bad, because you made this little package with such care. But in the future don't send anything more to me. It is better that you make something for yourself. Sell all your other things and buy for yourself only the best items that shall be more useful.

Papa writes to me a lot. He had received already two of your letters and had sent answers to you. Wait for them. I am not happy that he and his brother are not staying any more together. I think he will write you all about it. He waits to receive some kind of a certificate that will allow him to come here to see us. But Igor told him, 'There is nothing for me to do there.' Maybe he comes alone. I think he is waiting to see you soon. Search every opportunity to join him.

Here is as usual, lots of work. But on Sundays we are going for walks in the hills, or in the gardens, or in the city parks. For Lia these are the best hours when she is outside. She recognizes already very well the little dogs, cats, and horses. She moves her little legs and hands so fast, as if she wants to run after them and it is very difficult to hold her.

Every day brings many new things for her. She remains always very small and quick, but she is not skinny. She has beautiful strong legs and stands already alone. She walks very well on the balcony holding at the bars and making five to six steps. She derives a lot of pleasure to walk holding only my hand. We are hoping that in one month she will be walking very well.

Her whooping cough is going away slowly, now it is in a light phase. I caught from her also the whooping cough and it is already better. Yes, in her eight month my Lia is already weighing seven kilograms and had her first tooth, the lower one. Now it is coming out the second one. We are, very satisfied with her health. She will soon grow up into a pretty little girl.

She is smart and artful in getting what she wants. She says already perfectly 'mama' and is trying to say many combinations of letters, such as 'ta-ta-ta', 'gr-gr', 'ga-ga'. Now she is getting ready to use her throat sounds. Every evening after supper Giulio goes with Lia, and sometimes with me, to take a walk at the meadow in the vicinity. I embroider something and Lia plays on the grass

with children, or with her Papa.

My hands are little bit better. They are giving me the shots of *iodosulfina*. It is already the twentieth shot, but the healing is very slow. It is already more than two months that I am not washing clothes. Hopefully, it will not go on for too long. Giulio cannot wait when it will be over.

About the apartment for us for this winter, it is very doubtful that we will find one. They are asking from sixty to one hundred thousand liras only to search for the apartment and after to pay about one thousand liras per month for rent. Oh! How I would like to have my own quiet little corner but...we cannot afford it.

How are Rufin and *Pani* Lidia? Where Rufin is working? Always as far, or now he works in the local movie theater, as he wanted? And *Pani* Lidia, is she always looking as budding and lovely as before?

How are you doing Mama? How is your work? I know that it is not light and it is not going to improve. Giulio and I are talking often about your lives. I hope that you can meet with Papa soon. I was glad, that now you too believe that Lord God<sup>5</sup> would not forget you. Mama, keep your head up, Lord God had always helped us.

Giulio is hoping that after two or three years Rufin and his wife could make a trip to see us. It would be so nice.

I found one neighbor who is from the town of *Frau* Maria<sup>6</sup> but she is not very interesting and we see each other very rarely.

All in the family are sending their cordial greetings to all of you. Lia and Giulio are kissing you all. And naturally I am kissing you too. Greetings to Pietrowski family. As always, your children, Lala, Giulio, Lia.

P.S. Good night my dear Mama. Forgive me for such long silence but family life is not like living "at the mother's bosom."<sup>7</sup> Lala.

From this last letter of my daughter I found a lot about the progress of my granddaughter in growing up and I was thriving on this news. But I was really upset about the package I gave to that Italian for my daughter. He seemed to be such a nice young man. It was a lesson for me not to judge a person only by their manners and by their talkativeness. But I was still hoping that maybe his family moved and that he will notify my daughter later. I wrote immediately a letter<sup>8</sup> to my daughter to let her know about my concerns:

August 24, 1946, [Michalkowice, Poland]

My dear little daughter! I had received very quickly your last letter, of July 30, mailed with Air Mail. It was mailed August 8 and I received it on August 23, but it is too expensive for you, that's why I agree to have more patience and not deprive you of something.

Your last letter made a big impression on me. Really, I feel that there are some things you don't write to me completely. Your health is worrying me very much. The whooping cough is more dangerous for you then for Lia. And your hands! My God! I had thought that the Italian climate would be more favorable for your health. Or maybe that's the general influence of the change in the climate. Write to me why your hands are ailing. I ask you to write all the details about your

health. I thank both of you for writing many details about Lia. I congratulate her with her first tooth and her first steps. You, Lala, also have begun to walk at eight months.

How sorry I am that you didn't receive my package, which contained the shoes for Lia. I am sorry also for the books, which I found with grand difficulty. Try to find him. His woman told me that he departed from Prague on July 29. Maybe he didn't arrive yet. She gave me his other address: Giuseppe Pisani, Via Mussolini, No.2. I will try to keep in touch with his woman because he will write to her.

After your letter, I received a letter from Papa. After reading his letter, I understood also that everything is all right with him and that he hopes to see me again soon. But how it will happen? It will depend only on me, this I understood also from your letter.

But about his brother there is not even one word, not even a greeting. This surprised me very much because I had sent him a long letter, in which I described the life of his family. Papa's letter in general was very short and written in French. I would try to do something using his letter.

My life is as usual - I am working. But lately the business is bad. All those, who were giving good returns, had departed home. Also, it became difficult to buy good things. I am doing now as you suggested, I sell three of my old things and buy one new, to make my suitcases lighter.

Rufin and Lidia are in good health. Both of them became fat exclusively thanks to my patronage. Giulio, be very happy and tranquil—I have rendered well my gratitude. Sorry, that I cannot make you fat!

I would like to send you one more package with another comrade Italian, maybe he is more honest. I am surer of him, because he has a woman who confides with me.

The letters from Papa take very long to arrive, one-and-half months. To know the answer to something one has to wait three months!

Lala, does Lia crawl on the floor? Isn't your cold floor harmful for her health? Take care of her, evaluate every step, she had already endured enough illnesses. Take care of your health too! From it depends everything else, happiness and riches! Everything could be acquired, but health cannot be bought. Remember, in the beginning your father and I didn't have anything. And when you were born, we had for you only three sheets for your little bed, three little shirts, and a few diapers.

Forward my sincere greetings to Giulio's parents and Domenico. I embrace you dearly. Your mother.

P.S. You wrote that Papa does not live with his brother, but Papa doesn't write me anything about it. This I cannot understand.

P.S. Lately it rains every day. It seems that it is already autumn. And I am afraid that I am loosing time to be able to depart when it is still warm.

In the second half of August I received another letter<sup>9</sup> from Lala. It was written again in German:

August 18, 1946

Dearest mine and ours Mama! Dear Rufin and *Pani* Lidia!

It is so long that I wrote you. Right now, my mother-in-law is in the village at her sister's for relaxation and to find some olive oil produced there. I had been alone keeping the house. But Giulio is helping me very much.

Lia has already two lower teeth and now she is suffering from the third upper one. Also, she has a little cold from our concrete and tile floor. The little one is always energetic, vigorous, and not fat.

Mama, Lia had already worn out to the end the white shoes that I made for her. Can you imagine how she runs? Now we are beginning preparations for the winter. We have to sew and to mend everything for Lia and for us, stockings, pullovers, underwear, and other items. And Lia, this little mischief-maker is everywhere and requires all the time for herself.

On Sundays Giulio wants to relax. We go for a walk in the hills, always with something to eat for us and for Lia and remain there for half-a-day. And there is nothing to do to change his mind; he does not want to hear anything. There is no work that is important when is the time to relax outside in the fresh air and sun and to walk.

The little one is beginning already to say some words. She knows very well her Papa and loves him more than anybody else, because every evening he is bringing her for a walk. Outside, Lia rejoice to see the little dogs and kittens, and the little children.

Mama, it is too bad about your package. But also Santifero does not sound as an Italian name. The name and then the address at Via Roma, 35 is where are only the commercial buildings. We have searched very well, but there is no such person. For the future, don't send anything.

Dear Mama, I am receiving the letters from Papa very often. He will write also to you. Just wait. He will describe to you all. You must make everything possible from your side to join him. Because I understood that he cannot send anything for you.

Giulio and I also think that you should find some kind of work and wait a little when the peace will be signed. Because until now the things about the travel are not so easy; and we think that in the near future Papa can find an apartment and then he will call for you.

We also are searching all the time for a place for us to live, hopefully, for the next spring, if everything will be all right. But the prices are going up, they are already asking sixty thousand liras only for entering the apartment. We must wait.

And you *Mamusya*<sup>10</sup> try don't think much about me. You take good care of your health. I am happy and Giulio is always the same person like you knew him.

How is your life and work? And Rufin is always so jolly and shrewd? We remember very often him and all of you and pray Lord God to help you. Soon I will write to you a longer letter.

My hands are better with the injections of *iodosolfina*.

All are sending you their sincere greetings. We all kiss you dearly.

Greetings to Pietrowski family. Yours Lala, Giulio, Lia.

P.S. "Lots of greetings and kisses to you *Maman* and for *Pani* Lidia and

*Pan* Rufin. We have received a letter from that Italian Giuseppe. There is no package. He is telling us that they took the package from him at the border. *Pax!*<sup>11</sup> Giulio."

I was unhappy with too many things I read in the last letters from Lala and Giulio and right away sat to write them<sup>12</sup> a letter:

August 28, 1946, [Michalkowice, Poland]

My dear ones, I received very quickly your last letter, in eight days; it was mailed from Turin on the 20th and received on 28th.

Everything is fine, my dearest, but the health of Lia is making me very sad. Really, in every letter you write that Lia is sick! I have already written that I am afraid your tile floor is bad for her. You should not allow her to walk barefoot on the cold floor; it is also too dangerous to sit or to crawl on it. I am warning you because I remember one of our acquaintances told me how her daughter was sick from the cold floor. I am asking also you, Giulio, to consider and pay attention to this. It is an enigma that after Lia was born she is always sick!

You write that she is energetic and that you take good care of her. If she will be energetic as her grandmother, that's me, I wish her well. It is natural that she is vigorous, those are the traits of her parents. I imagine well as she walks. Lala, you were walking well also at this age of eight months. That's because of being so energetic that you have a star on your forehead. Therefore, you should pay good attention, because with the children one should use precaution and prevention.

You don't write anything about the language. In what language does Lia learn to speak and you speak with her? One day the little boy, Lidia's nephew, looking at Lia's photo reflected for a while and said, 'What a lucky child, she will speak in all languages. Because her mother speaks three languages, her grandmother speaks many languages, and her father speaks also Italian.' He made us laugh a lot.

From Papa I received only one letter. From your letter I understood that, if I myself cannot make something, then I must wait. You write that he must receive a good job and then to call me. I couldn't understand, who, Giulio or papa?

I want to try to do something with Papa's letter; I am waiting for Rufin who should return on Friday, August 30, because he is going back to work on September 2 after vacations. I hope that the autumn will not arrive too quickly and does not make me to depart in haste. But it is all very problematic yet. It is yet only a hope.

My work from one day to another becomes more difficult to do business - it is enough only for me alone. But will it be enough to nourish the three persons for the whole winter? If not, it is too bad—I would not be able to do it. And without the money one cannot be cherished no matter how closely related one is. That's why the winter for me also will be a problem to live here.

I am embracing you very dearly. Keep yourself in good health, especially Lia. Lala, remember what I wrote about Lia, cherish her. My greetings to Verro family. Send my love to Papa. Your mother.

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1. Piekari, Slaskie, a town in southwestern Poland known for the church with the Venerated Piekary Saint Mary.
  2. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, postcard to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] Piekary, Slaskie, Poland, August 10, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
  3. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and her son-in-law [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, August 12, 1946.
  4. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in German] Turin Italy, July 30, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro..
  5. Russian Orthodox way of referring to God.
  6. *Frau* Maria Alexandrova, my friend from Laband, was from the city of Kharkov. See the chapter "Presswerke Laband."
  7. Ukrainian proverb.
  8. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, August 24, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
  9. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in German] Turin, Italy, August 18, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
  10. Diminutive for Mama [in Russian].
  11. Piece! [in Latin].
  12. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, August 28, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

## My Future Hangs On Thread Of Hope

**Olga Gladky Verro**  
**As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**

I was waiting impatiently to hear from my husband.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the letter from him arrived. I opened it with the hope to find the documents that I requested about his place of residence and work in Germany. To my great disappointment it was only a short letter<sup>2</sup> in French written for him by somebody else:

July 29, 1946

Dear Antonina! There is change in my life. Our firm, company, will be working elsewhere, where, I don't know yet definitely. But I have permission for living accommodations here, because I don't know how long my work will last. But my address will not change. My sister is in the hospital. But the owner of the apartment said that she might arrive here, because I wrote to him about it before I knew that I must depart. It is a pity that you are not here, because I have to leave all my things in this empty apartment. Since I know for a long time the owner, I trust him as myself.

I have received one letter from Lala that introduced me to everything. Without doubt you are interested about my life. It is not all as bad as I presented. We work with my brother and we don't need anything.

One thing is worrying me very much is the health of my sister whom I am

expecting with impatience. And why my home shall be without her? The doctor said that to cure her completely an operation is necessary; there shall be no risk if she could make this during the 8-10 months. I would like to know your opinion about this. I think it is necessary that she make this decision so she wouldn't be always sick and remain in a hospital.

How are you, my dear? I know, it is hard also for you to be alone. What can be done? How to help you?

Greetings from me to everybody. I am waiting for your letter with immense impatience. I embrace you tenderly. Your Orest.

It took me a while to understand the message in my husband's enigmatic letter. First I had to decipher the handwriting and then the meaning, because it was written as an allegory, which I suggested in my letter to him. Probably Lala had cautioned him not to write anything that might compromise me with the Soviets in case the letter would fall into their hands. My husband went beyond what I suggested allegorizing and hiding the true names and meaning.

However, I understood that he couldn't yet have a document from his place of work, because he is searching how to get it. One thing was clear that he has a place to live probably in a camp. And "the owner of the apartment" whom he trusts is probably the Americans. He writes that he is expecting me and that his address remains the same. This part of the allegory was easy to understand.

Then all that he is writing about "his sister", he is talking about me. That he is worrying about me and expects with impatience the news about my situation. He writes, as I suggested that this sister is sick, that she is in a hospital and needs an operation. I understood that he had deciphered it from my letter that I could be in a serious trouble being in the Soviet occupied country and that I need to make my decision soon for a departure from here, because I do not want to remain here for the rest of my life.

"The doctor", as I wrote to him, meant somebody who is helping me in my "operation" or a departure. And that it should be safe if it is done within the next 8-10 months.

Well, considering what we have deciphered from each other's letters, there was actually nothing concrete at this time. The important thing was that he understood what kind of documents he had to send me. This gave me a hope that he would try to obtain them. But, I need to wait maybe for very long time. However, my hope to get reunited with my husband went up, since all German families were also waiting for a departure.

I had no secrets from Lidia and Rufin and always read to them all the letters from Lala and Giulio. This time I also shared with them the contents and the interpretation of my husband's letter.

Rufin promptly commented to me, "I told you, that now you have only to find the right person to make documents to your specification! From his letter it is clear that he is trying to find somebody to do it. Don't worry; you will join your husband very soon!" But I felt that my future was hanging on the thin hair of a hope that depended on the expectations, which were contrary to all reasonable estimates of probability.

However, Rufin's prediction had to be admired, because soon after my husband's letter I received an answer to my second letter to Monsieur Etienne Demey. In my letter, prompted by Rufin, I asked my French friend to send me some kind of identification

document stating that I was French and explained to him that it just might help me to join my husband in Germany.

I never expected that he would send me such paper. With great suspense I opened the envelope and, to my great surprise there was a short letter, and an affidavit with all the necessary notarization, stating that I was French. I translated it and handed document to Rufin, who probably was also surprised, but he remained composed and said, "*Pani*, remember what I told you, today you just need to find the right person."

Lidia asked, "Is this document a valid identification?"

"If the person who checks it accepts it, then it is valid," Rufin replied. He already found out that the registration of the German wives and families for a departure to Germany was done by the office of the Red Cross in Katowice. But the local Catholic priests were in charge of screening the applicants and the Red Cross was responsible for registering and the convoy train. He also found out that a voluntary donation to cover the costs of this operation was appreciated.

"*Pani*," he said to me, "tomorrow we will go to the parish where the Red Cross employee is coming. We will try to register you as a French woman joining her husband in Germany."

"I don't have yet the documents from my husband," I said. "Take with you your husband's letters," he replied. "And don't worry. Leave all the talking to me."

We had a meeting with the priest and Rufin told him confidentially the truth, who I was and that my husband was indeed in Germany. I showed him my husband's letters and the document that I just received from my French friend.

"What is written here?" asked the priest. "It's an affidavit that *Pani* is French," answered Rufin. Then he added, "And *Pani* is waiting from her husband a paper with his address and the place of work in Germany."

"Can you help me, Father, to join my husband?" I asked humbly.

The priest answered in an indirect way, "In the next room there is a woman from the Red Cross; she is registering for the convoy train to Germany. You don't have to tell her anything what Rufin told me about you. Just show her this document from France and tell her that this is your identification paper and show her the envelope with your husband's letters and tell her that you are waiting from him the official papers with his address and workplace in Germany."

"Thank you, thank you, Father," I said.

"Thank you very much, Father," Rufin seconded.

The priest led me to another room. Standing at the door, he said to the woman sitting at the desk, "Here is another woman to register."

The woman who had the Red Cross emblem on her arm saluted me in German, "*Guten Tag!*"<sup>3</sup>

"*Guten Tag!*" I answered. She continued to talk to me in German and I did the same.

"Is your husband in Germany now?"

"*Ya*," I replied.

"Show me his papers."

"I am waiting for them to arrive soon. Here is his address." And I gave her the envelope with his letters.

"Show me your identification papers?"

I gave her my French affidavit. The woman looked at it carefully and asked, "Are you French?"

"Ya."

The woman filled the Red Cross pass with my name and birth date. Giving it to me she said, "This pass is valid only for the convoy train for the wives and families of the German men who are now in Germany. You will be responsible to buy your ticket and when you will board the train, you should have your husband's papers with his address and place of work."

"I know," I replied and asked her, "When the train is scheduled to depart?"

"We don't know yet. Keep in touch with this office. Good luck!" She made me understand that she had finished with me.

I said, "*Danke schön. Auf Wiedersehen!*"<sup>4</sup>

"*Auf Wiedersehen!*" she dismissed me.

I walked out of the room surprised with the ease this Red Cross pass was given to me. I expected a severe scrutiny of my papers and questioning about my husband's whereabouts.

Rufin was waiting for me. I showed him the Red Cross pass and told him what happened.

"Well, it was very easy," he said, "Thanks to the good will of the charitable Father. You should leave them a good donation." And I did it with great generosity.

"Now you have only to wait for the papers from your husband and to board the convoy train to Germany."

"I don't know, I don't feel yet that it is real."

"You will! Read what is written on the pass: 'Valid for the convoy train to Germany for the German wives and families.'"

When we came home, Lidia asked me, "Do you have good news? How was your interview?"

I replied, "It is all done. I have the pass for the convoy train to Germany."

Rufin said, "*Pani* gave a generous donation to the church for this. It was the Father who made it happen."

Lidia wanted to know all the details. Rufin and I recounted everything. When we finished our story Lidia concluded, "I told you, the Virgin Mary would show you the road to follow in joining your husband."

"Now, let's hope that my husband's papers will arrive in time before the departure of the convoy train," I concluded.

"*Pani*," said Rufin convincingly, "stop worrying! With this pass from the Red Cross you will be able to board the train. If they will check your other documents, you show them first your papers stating that you are French. Then, if your husband's papers didn't arrive, start to look for them in your bag, like you misplaced them. Then show your husband's letter and the envelope with his address, as you did during the registration."

Rufin's reasoning was quite convincing. Therefore, I immediately wrote a letter<sup>5</sup> to my husband explaining that there are some probabilities that eventually could become possibilities to join him:

September 18, 1946, [Michalkowice, Poland]

Dear Orest! Today I have received your third letter while this is my seventh

letter. Your last letter made a big impression on me. Really, so pessimistic... Your destiny as is also mine is a vagabond life and I have been already used to it. We cannot complain about this definition, because we are without a roof.

I am making at this moment all possible to be with you and to share all that destiny shall send to us, even more now when your relationship with Igor is so painful for me. What happened? Why? It seems to me that in your situation, how you were, it should have made you to be closer, but in reality it happen just the opposite. How strange it is, how strange. I would like to know all the truth, but you are not writing anything. It seems to me that your difficult characters are not the reason for it. I am waiting for your answer to this question.

Next, I am worrying about your health, but you don't say anything about it. It remains logical for me only to think, *He is alive and he is probably in good health.*

As about me, lately I feel a little bit weak. My work and in general my age makes me feel this way. Don't you for-get, your wife had also aged, but they say that I am still very energetic! Really, every day I am traveling and all day stand on my feet at the market. It makes me tremble only to think that this winter I would have to remain again standing all day outside. That's why I am making the efforts to change my work and the climate.

I already wrote you about the operation of the sister. It is inevitable, and one needs to make all necessary preparations for it. With the first possibility it shall be accomplished and I assume that for this winter, or maybe sooner, for this autumn, the sister will be at home, as the professor had promised me.

Monsieur Demey mailed me one letter and also a document that I asked him about. He writes that he mailed the letters to you and Lala. His address that you have is of his parents. I am giving you another one, his own: 'Monsieur Etienne Demey, Petit Rue P. Engel, Bavillieis territ. De Belfort, France.' Just in case that we might need it again.

I am waiting also a letter from Lala, because your letters are coming always at the same time. As about Lala, I represent well her life. Thank God that she is in good health. The conditions of her life are not very desirable, but what one can do? Let's hope that this improves with time. Everything cannot be done at once. Do you remember well our life? We also didn't have anything. And after, by working, acquired little by little everything we needed. I wrote her that now she should take care of her health, eat well, and other things shall come with time.

Do you have a photo of the little one? How she resembles you, but Lala writes that she is energetic and underscores that her character resembles mine.

I mailed her one package through an Italian, but regrettably he was not honest and they didn't receive it.

Well, in conclusion, to answer your question, wait little bit and your sister shall make an operation, and after some time she will come out of a hospital.

I am waiting for your answer. I receive your letters in about three to four weeks.

Give my greetings to your friends and, to be polite, say hello from me to Igor. But, it seems to me that the contrariness of your characters should not prevent him from sending me his greetings. I embrace you dearly. Your Antonina.

I was hoping that he would decipher my allegoric description of the situation. Although I had already hinted in the last letter to Lala and Giulio about my hope to join Papa, I decided to write another letter<sup>6</sup> to explain them about my preparations for a departure:

September 19, 1946, [Michalkowice, Poland]

My dear children, it is long time that you don't write to me and I also don't talk to you. The reason is that I made all preparations for my departure. It seems to me that the time had come for this. Rufin promised to help me, as he did for you, and I hope that this fall I would join Papa.

Papa's last letter, where he wrote about his relationship with Igor, had reconfirmed that I am needed for him and also for me. The life will be more supportable to be with someone who is my dear one. Therefore, don't be surprised if you would receive my letter with another address. I don't know the consequences of this operation, but, whatever shall be the results, I had decided to accept anything.

How is the health of the little one? How are her teeth? Write to me as quickly as possible about your life.

I have been used so much to live with the family here that separation with them is frightful and painful. We made the photograph with Rufin and Lidia, a good photo.<sup>7</sup> I have one for you. If it will be possible, I will mail it to you.

Keep yourself in good health. My greetings to the whole family. I embrace you dearly, all three of you. Your mother.

After sending the letter to my husband, I was impatiently waiting for his letter, in which I hoped to find the documents that I asked. Meanwhile Rufin kept himself informed at the Red Cross office about the departure of the convoy train to Germany. I prepared my suitcase with the best and most needed items of my clothing and sorted out what I was leaving behind with Lidia. She agreed to keep it safe until will be possible to send it to me, wherever it will be in the future.

During the last ten days after I wrote the letter to my daughter I didn't received any letters from anybody. Not knowing yet when the convoy train to Germany will be, I decided to write another letter<sup>8</sup> to Lala and Giulio:

September 29, 1946, [Michalkowice, Poland]

My dear children! In one month it will be one year that I am at Rufin's and Lidia's home and, therefore, one year that you and I were separated. The time flies very fast, but the events pass very slowly.

I have very big hope to rejoin Papa by departing soon. But it looks that this would happen by the circumstances independent of me. It resembles, or maybe it will be with me, as it was with you—a sudden departure; and in a short time I will be with him.

My business becomes from one day to another more difficult. I am earning something, but I have enough money to live for one year.

About the situation of Papa I learn more from the newspapers then from

his letters. Until now I have received only three letters from him, while I mailed to him seven. His letters and yours I receive in about three weeks.

I would like to travel with him wherever he shall go, so I would share with him all that destiny shall send us. But, if this will be impossible, then what I can do? I am making all possible to join him, otherwise I would have to remain with Rufin and Lidia. I hope that they would not chase me out of their house. The economic situation here is also not too good and the life as everywhere else is very hard after the war.

I would like to believe that everything is fine with you; that Lia is in good health, that she is not coughing any more, and that she does not have a cold; that with you, Lala, the hands are better; that you, Giulio, are always in good mood; and that all of you are in good health as we are all here.

I am used so much to be in Rufin's family that I cannot represent the moment when I would have to part with them. But, looking from another side, I dread to remain to live with them without money when I would be a burden to them. Because there is a saying, "Money does everything." That's why I feel the need to join Papa. I also feel that he needs me, that he feels the solitude the same as I feel it.

It is already autumn here. If I start to think that I would have to remain outside this winter, it makes me tremble. That's why I am doing everything to depart. How I am sorry that I lost the moment when I didn't go with him before.

I wrote to Papa not to hurry to depart without me, to wait for me, and, if the situation does not depend from him, not to go too far. Write him my opinion about this; maybe he didn't receive my letters yet.

I already wrote to you that I had received a letter from Monsieur Demey with a certificate for me. He writes that he received the letters from you and from Papa, but all these letters remained for a long time at his parents home, because they believed that they were from a girlfriend and didn't wanted to compromise him with his wife. That's why his answer was so late. I am giving you his new address. We shouldn't lose our liaison with him. His address is: "Petit Rue P. Engel, Bavillieu territ, De Belfort, France."

Have you received the photo of us three? It was taken as a souvenir at the moment when I decided to depart.

I embrace you all very dearly. My greetings to the parents. Rufin, Lidia and Pietrowski family send their cordial greetings. Your mother.

P.S. Send always my greetings to Papa.

P.S. I give you new address of Giuseppe<sup>9</sup> Pisani: "Via Cottolengo 25, Biella, Vercelli." Write him and demand an explanation. Maybe he still has the books.

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1. As recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and from her letters, trans. Olga Gladky Verro

2. Orest M. Gladky, letter to his wife (in French) Mannheim, Germany, July 29, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

3. "Good day!" [in German].

4. "Thank you very much. Good bye!" [in German].

5. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her husband [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, September 18, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

6. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] Michalkowice,

Poland, September 19, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

7. From the preserved photograph.

8. Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in French] Michalkowice, Poland, September 29, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

9. The Italian, who had a package for Lala and Giulio. This name is different from the name Santifero given for the same person in the previous letter of August 12, 1946.

## The Red Cross Train To Germany

**Olga Gladky Verro**

**As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky**

The days were going by and there was not yet set the date for the departure from Poland of the convoy train to Germany for the German wives and families.<sup>1</sup> Toward the middle of September I reduced the number of my trips to the market to a minimum and was going there only to buy food for cooking after being sure that there was no news about the train on that day.

Rufin was checking often with the Red Cross office in Katowice. They were positive that the convoy train would definitely depart in the near future. Lately they advised to check with them daily and keep the luggage ready; they were expecting that the train would be available on a very short notice. My tension was increasing with each day that passed in waiting.

It was at that time that I finally received the letter from my daughter mailing me my husband's letter<sup>2</sup> with the Certificate.<sup>3</sup> It was handwritten in German:

### Certificate

*Herr*<sup>4</sup> Orest M. Hladkij,<sup>5</sup> 44 years of age, is working in the Weinheim Puppets Theater Bi-Ba-Bo as a Puppetmaster from the date of July 7, 1946. He is residing at Lindenstrasse, 11, Weinheim, a.d. Bergstrasse, Deutchland.<sup>6</sup>

This certificate was given for the purpose of receiving the travel permit to Germany for his wife Antonina G. Hladkij, 51 years old.

Date: September 25, 1946.

Signature: Dmitri Tschibrischvili, Theater Manager.

There was no seal of any kind affixed on this Certificate. And it was signed by a person to whom I was mailing the letters for my husband. The funniest thing was the name of his workplace and I was doubtful if it would be valid.

When Rufin came home, I asked him if he considered it to be valid without the seal.

"It is better than nothing," he replied. "It will depend who will be checking it. If he wants to accept it, then it will be valid." He inspected the envelope and said, "Keep this certificate in the envelope, because it has German post stamps, the postage seal with the date, and the name of the town from where it was mailed, and the address is

corresponding to that on the so-called Certificate. They complement each other for the identification purposes."

He reflected for a while and with the expression of a wise man on his face added, "If the Polish border police would be checking your documents, they would only be happy that you leave Poland. If the Soviet soldiers will be checking it, they would not be able to read German and would accept anything as long as you have the Red Cross pass. If the American authorities would check it or the German border police, which I doubt very much they would be allowed to check it at this time, they probably would only welcome you."

Lidia smiled satisfied with her husband's smart riddle and said, "*Pani*, remember that the Virgin Mary will be with you all the way to your husband's dwelling door. She wouldn't have shown you the road to follow, if it was not meant for you to join your husband." On his part Rufin was showing satisfaction with his wife's unconditional faith.

For me remained only to agree with both of them and to continue to worry alone when I went to sleep. What could I do, if I am an incorrigible pessimist? However, the reasoning of both spouses attenuated my worry and I slowly fell asleep.

The next day I received the letter<sup>7</sup> from Lala. It was written in German:

September 30, 1946

Dear Mama! Only Mama is always able to forgive to her children. I still have so much work to do, everything for the winter for me and for Lia. I shall make beautiful and stylish dresses for my little doll. So, Giulio will be triumphant before his mother that Lala is also able to make nice things. But I had to work only at nights, because my little evildoer does not allow me to work during the day.

Our house is very uncomfortable; Lia has so little room to run, she doesn't want to sit and all the time we have to run after her! Now all the illnesses are gone; she has a nice coloring on the round cheeks, and has hard thighs. Yes, she has already six teeth, four up and two down. She calls already very well 'Mamma,' 'Papa', 'Nonna, 'tata', as she calls the children. She understands already a lot. And she is already a little scamp, how she laughs making fun when Giulio and I are kissing. She is so small that when she runs she resembles a little kitten. And how stubborn she already is! When she is outside, she wants to walk alone and there is nothing to do, if one wants to hold her, she screams like a siren.

We are sending you her best up to now photo. In the next letter we will send one for Rufin and *Pani* Lidia. We are so happy to mail you her photo. She came out so natural and we are so pleased that she is healthy and plump.

My hands have healed already. I received thirty injections of medication (*solfoiodzina* and *iodosolfina*).

From Papa I received two copies of letters for you. I think that you have already received the same letters and, therefore, I am not mailing them. As I understood him, he cannot do anything else for you. And until the peace treaty had been signed, I also cannot do anything. Therefore, you yourself should search everywhere to come either to us, or to him. And he has already now the possibility to travel, but he had waited all this time for you to cross the ocean together. And we have only hope in you and in Rufin to find your way out of

Poland.

It seems to me, that it is wasteful to write separate letters for you and for Rufin, because you also write one letter together and read our letters together as one family.

Well Rufin, how are you? In two to three years you could come to Italy, because now the life is so much disrupted and uncomfortable. One must wait until everything will be in order and then in a short time you could see several places. And we would be a little bit wealthier then we are now.

From September 8 to 11, in our home was Bruno with his wife. With the next letter we will send you their photo.

For this spring we have to find for us a place to live, because it is very difficult for me to live in such a big family. Only the work for our three men takes so much time that I have no time to make something for me or for my little one. It is difficult, especially because we are very different in our characters as well as in our habits.

Mama, you have to write some recipes for cooking preserves, marinades, and a little bit of baking cakes and cookies. Ask also *Pani* Lidia, if you are out of practice now.

I have already figured it out, if I could not find for me some work in an office, I shall find a sewing and patternmaking school and it should give me a background for the children's clothing. Then I could work at home and always have my Lia under my eyes.

Giulio always helps me. He doesn't have the time to study. In the evening he must amuse Lia and let the home relax quietly and let us women to do some work. But there are very few men like Giulio!

It is so bad that I didn't receive any books from you. This Pisani came to our house, but he is a big liar. He said that everything was taken at the Polish border during the inspection. We think that it is not true because when we departed there was no inspection at the border. Now you shouldn't send me anything through Italians.

I am beginning to forget all foreign languages, while in Italian I am always getting better and better. With Lia we speak Italian, but later on I would like her to learn also my motherland's language.

Our kisses to Rufin and Pani Lidia. Sincere greetings to family Pietrowski. We embrace you dearly and kiss you.

Yours Lala, Giulio, and little Lia.

As always, I read this letter to Rufin and Lidia and we discussed the news after the supper. First of all, we admired the photo of Lia and commented about her progress in growing up. Then Lidia and I talked about understanding Lala's difficulties living in a large family and about her desire to have a place of her own and to take care only of her daughter and her husband.

Then I switched the discussion to the topic of immediate interest, "Lala didn't receive yet my letter where I wrote her that I have a good chance to join Papa, because she doesn't make any comments about it." Lidia agreed with me.

Rufin reflected, "*Pani*, this opportunity to depart to Germany with the convoy train

for the German wives and families came just in the right time. As you can see, your daughter and Giulio couldn't do anything now for you from Italy and your husband has already the opportunity to depart overseas."

Lidia instead voiced her thoughts, "Speaking French, German, and Polish will help *Pani* during the trip when her documents will be checked."

"Don't forget that the Russian language will help her to understand what the Soviet guards say and want," added Rufin.

"The best of all is," I commented, "that there will be many German women and children traveling together and the Soviet guards would not search for the Soviet citizens hiding among them."

On October 23, Rufin, as usual, went to the Red Cross office to find out the news about the departure of the convoy train to Germany. He came home earlier than usual and announced the big news, "The convoy train for the German wives and families is departing tomorrow afternoon from the Station of Breslau."<sup>8</sup> We will come with you all the way to see you off. We have to take early train from Katowice to be there on time."

I was glad that they were coming with me, especially Rufin, in case if there were problems, he could help me to solve them.

Lidia and I went quickly to say good-bye to her parents, her sister, and her brother's family. Everybody wished me a successful trip and all were happy for me. But, all were genuinely sad to see me leave, knowing that probably we would never see each other again. It was the hardest of all to say good-bye to Lidia's mother, who was so kind to me and who was very ill and I knew that she was not expected to live for very long.

While Lidia was preparing supper, I decided to check once more the items I was taking with me. Although my suitcase was ready for long time, I wanted to make it lighter to carry. I showed to Lidia what I was leaving behind and again she promised me to keep it safe until will be possible to mail it to me. Again, as I did this already several times in the last few years, I was leaving most of my possessions behind. But I knew that it was impossible for me to carry the heavy luggage and the practical side of me had won.

Lidia prepared for me some food for the trip and gave me the whole long salami that I bought recently on the market for the family. She said, "You take this for your husband." I placed a little packet with the few pieces of gold jewelry at the bottom of the enameled cup, which we brought from our home in the Ukraine. Then I asked Lidia to give me some butter to cover the gold, to hide it in case of the inspection on the border. I placed all food in a large market bag.

Then I checked all my documents in my purse where I also had the German marks that I had and all the Polish zloty that I earned during this year. I had enough money to probably feed all three of us through the whole winter. I needed it now to pay for the tickets for all three of us from Katowice to Breslau, and for me from Breslau to Mannheim in Germany. The remaining Polish money I decided to give to Lidia at the station when we will be saying good-byes, because at that time it was almost impossible to exchange the currencies of the European countries and I decided not to take them with me.

We spent the rest of the evening in reminiscing the past year that I lived with Rufin and Lidia. All three of us were glad that my dream to join my husband was to become a reality, but we also felt very sad about our separation, because we really got

used to live as a family, to depend on each other, and on the contributions each of us provided for the common good.

I felt uncertain and insecure leaving my adoptive family, which provided me with the physical and emotional stability and feeling of belonging after Lala and Giulio had left. But I also felt sorry to leave my friends Rufin and Lidia who had to get along without my help, without my market savvy and hard work, in very difficult economic conditions in the post-war Poland.

On October 24, 1946, the day of my departure to Germany, we got up early in the morning, although we had plenty of time to get to Katowice to catch the train to Breslau. I tidied my room while Lidia was preparing a hearty breakfast, because she anticipated that we would be without food for the good portion of the day.

I didn't feel eating all that food that she placed on the plate for me, but Lidia prompted me, "*Pani*, you should eat your breakfast, you have a very long trip ahead. Who knows when you will be able to eat a hot meal again? Take the example from Rufin, he is ready to ask for the seconds!"

"Lidia," I replied, "I am so nervous that I have butterflies in my stomach."

"That's why you should put some food in there and it will calm you down," explained Lidia.

I tried to make her happy and forced myself to eat. We finished eating breakfast in silence. It seems each of us was absorbed in own thoughts and didn't want to interfere with those of the others. Rufin interrupted the silence by prompting us while he was donning his coat, "It's time to go! You better hurry, if you don't want to miss the train."

Lidia and I stopped clearing up the table and hurried up to follow his example. Rufin went in my room took my suitcase and walked outside. We heard him talking to the mailman.

As I opened the door, Rufin handed me a letter<sup>9</sup> from my husband. I opened it hastily and quickly glanced through to see if there was anything important. It was a very short letter and the handwriting of his friend was atrocious. I decided to read it slowly and to decipher his French in the streetcar on our way to Katowice:

Dear Antonina, I have mailed you through Lala a Certificate about my work so you may come here. Answer me if you had received it.

You are writing more often to Lala than to me. This is very good, because she crosschecks our letters and, thanks to this, she may readily send the news to me. But Giulio didn't send me yet his photo.

One of these days I saw Igor. He lives with his 'sister and brother' in a DP<sup>10</sup> camp of UNRRA.<sup>11</sup> They are waiting the date of departure overseas, either to America, to Canada, or to Argentina. When it should be, they don't know yet. At this time they are both working. They are saying that they had lost their Motherland and they must search for an-other one. They send you their friendly greetings.

I could also go far from here. If something is going to change, I will write to you immediately. In any case, I have here an apartment where we both could live. Here everybody is waiting for you. I hope to see you soon. All our friends send you their friendly greetings. I embrace you very, very dearly. Your Orest."

When I finished reading, Rufin asked me if there was anything new. "No, nothing new," I answered. "Everything that I knew already. The only important thing, he is asking, if I had received his Certificate."

"Put this letter together with his other letters. It might be additional evidence that he is living in Germany," Rufin suggested.

A distance by rail from Katowice to Breslau was about two hundred kilometers. There were lots of passengers in the train, but Lidia and I were lucky to find a place to sit together, while Rufin stood on his feet for a while until he found a place in another compartment. Anyway, we could talk only about things that could not be compromising for my departure.

Lidia asked me, "Write to us immediately at your arrival and tell us everything about your trip."

I asked her, "Mail me the letters from my daughter, if you shall receive them." I also told her, "I would never forget your and Rufin's friendship and hospitality, which meant so much for me during the whole year when I was so far from my family."

Lidia complimented me by saying, "We enjoyed very much your company and appreciated your efforts in contributing to the food provisions for the family."

I was glad to hear from her the recognition of my hard work at the market. Then we talked about her mother's incurable illness and the difficult time for the whole family watching her to slowly fade away. I told Lidia how fond I was of her mother and how sorry I was that such a nice person had to suffer so much. Lidia took my hand and told me with conviction, "It is all in the God's mercy, to make her suffer as little as possible."

And I envied her in that moment for her unconditional faith at such tragic time in the life of her mother, whom she loved so much. After this painful exchange we sat silently for a very long time immersed in our own thoughts.

Rufin came in our compartment and told us to be ready, that Breslau was the next stop of the train. We needed to hurry to buy the tickets for me and we didn't know if we had to stay in line. He put down my suitcase from the upper shelf and told us to move closer to the exit. We remained standing until the train stopped at the station and Rufin helped us to the platform.

Inside the station Rufin found a Red Cross woman who was checking passes and documents for the convoy train to Germany and brought me to her. She spoke to me in German, "Please, show me your Red Cross pass and the address where you are going." I showed her the pass and envelope with the Weinheim address where were the certificate and the letters from my husband. She checked only the Red Cross pass and said, "Go to that ticket window and buy a one-way ticket to Weinheim, Germany. Then hurry to the convoy train, it is already full and will depart soon."

Rufin told Lidia and me, "Go to buy the ticket and wait for me. I will see where the convoy train is parked."

As we came to the ticket window, a German woman who just bought the ticket asked me, "Are you going to Germany too?"

"Ya," I replied.

Looking at me and at Lidia she asked, "Are you traveling together?"

"No, I am alone," I answered again shortly.

The woman insisted, "I am also alone. I will wait for you."

I purchased the ticket then embraced Lidia and said good-bye to her. We both had tears in our eyes. I took the bundle of Polish zloty from my bag and put it in her hand.

"I have no more use for them," I said, "you keep them for a rainy day."

Lidia looked at the thick bundle of money and said sincerely, "Thank you, *Pani*, thank you." And she kissed me again and I felt her tears on my cheek.

At that moment Rufin came back and said to Lidia, "You stay here and wait for me, because the convoy train is parked very far from here." He grabbed my suitcase and ordered me to follow him in a hurry.

All this time the German woman was discreetly waiting for me at a short distance. I looked at her and said, "Let's go!" And both of us followed Rufin who led the way on the railroad tracks to the convoy train that was parked quite a distance from the station. The cars were already packed full with women standing on the car platforms and even on the steps.

Rufin selected a car where there was some room on the platform and stopped to say good bye to me. He embraced and kissed me on the cheek and said, "Take care of you, *Pani*."

"Thank you, Rufin, for everything you have done for me," I said. "I would never forget it."

Somewhat embarrassed Rufin asked me, "How about the Polish money, *Pani*? Are you taking them to Germany? You cannot exchange them there." I didn't expect to hear from him such tactless question. He probably was expecting that I would offer him the money of my free will. He obviously was so eager to get hold of my hard earned money that, when he saw me ready to depart without giving them to him, he impudently asked me about them.

I answered him calmly with a touch of innocent despise in my voice, "I gave already all the money to Lidia."

He became embarrassed and said, "Thank you, thank you, *Pani*. I am sorry, I didn't know."

At that moment the conductor came, checked our tickets, and said, "You may board the train. It will depart very soon."

Rufin helped me first and then he helped the German woman to climb up the steps and pushed our suitcases on the car platform. "Take care of you!" he said once more. "I have to go, Lidka is waiting for me." I answered to him in German, "*Auf Wiedersehen*." And he left.

"It is good not to be alone during the trip," said German woman, who adopted me as her companion. "Let's keep close to each other."

"Very well," I answered, "I agree with you."

We were standing on the car platform and the other women who were ahead of us were not moving inside. My newly found companion commented. "It seems that the car is packed and we will be traveling standing here."

"It will be cold here when the train starts moving," I replied.

Shortly after we boarded the train the conductors began to give signals with their whistles and the convoy train slowly began to move. It seemed that the movement of the train forced the passengers inside to find better standing positions and we were able to get at least behind the door and find the place to stand

between the door and the first window supporting ourselves against the wall. Although we had our suitcases on which we could sit, there was no room to do it with the women standing too close to us in the passageway.

At the Polish-German border the train stopped and several men of the Polish border guards forced themselves into each car. They knew that this was a convoy train of the German wives and families and were very rude in checking the luggage of their former enemies. They dipped their hands into the bags and suitcases of the helpless women; they grabbed without scruples everything they liked, as if it was their right, and collected it in the big bags. They behaved more like the outlaw train robbers than the law enforcement agents.

Standing close to the door I was among the first ones to be searched. One of the guards came close to me and dipped his hands into my big market bag where I had my food and the items that I could need on the road to have them handy in case of rain or cold weather. He grabbed my new raincoat and new big woolen kerchief that were on top and then found my good leather handbag and took it too. He continued to dig further and pulled out the cup where I hid the gold jewelry covered with butter.

I began to beg him in Polish "*Pan* Guard, please, my stomach is very ill and the butter is one thing that I can eat." I pulled out from the bottom of my bag the long salami and said, "Take this salami. I cannot eat it. Look how big it is, and leave this little bit of butter for me."

My trick worked, the man took the salami and returned the cup with the butter. I didn't complain any more being scared that he might open my suitcase and take even more things from it. He moved to check the luggage of my German companion and indeed asked her to open her suitcase and rummaged through all her clothes taking several items. All women standing nearby watched this injustice in silence, as if it was none of their business what was happening to their neighbors and compatriots. No one wanted to attract attention being afraid to provoke the anger of the insatiable Polish guard and to become his next victim.

After this pilferage ended and the Polish border guards left with their booty, the car filled with the voices of the indignant German women. Some were complaining with their neighbors and enumerated the items taken from them, the others were cursing loudly at the Polish men, and some were crying. The train moved and I heard somebody saying, "Thank God, soon we will be in Germany."

It was a long, long trip and the convoy train was traveling through German territory without stopping. It was just reducing the speed on the railway stations. In one place the train had to cross a very large river on the bridge that was being restored after being damaged during the war. There the train was traveling very slowly, but I could feel the vibrations of the bridge and could see the water from the window. I had the impression that at any moment the bridge would collapse and the train would plunge into the river. After the bridge the train picked up speed and traveled all night through German territory. Through the window I could see suddenly appearing and as quickly disappearing the lights of the railroad stations and the slowly appearing sea of lights of the big cities.

My legs were so tired from standing for so many hours that I could not feel them any more. My German companion suggested to me that I could lean with my back against the wall and slide down slowly to sit on my suitcase. Although this was not very

comfortable either, with the women standing too close to me, but in the new position I could nap during the night and to endure to the end of the trip.

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1. As recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and from her letters.
2. Orest M. Gladky, letter to his daughter Olga [in Russian] Mannheim, Germany, October 7, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
3. Certificate [in German] Mannheim, Germany, September 25.
4. Mister [in German].
5. German spelling of the Ukrainian spelling of a name Gladky.
6. The address of Dmitri Tschibrishvili, a friend of Orest M. Gladky.
7. Olga Gladky Verro, letter to her mother [in German] Turin, Italy, September 30, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
8. Name of the town in German. In Polish the name is Wroctaw.
9. Orest M. Gladky, letter to his wife [in French] Mannheim, Germany, n.d. , private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.
10. Displaced Persons during the WW II.
11. United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration established by the Allies in 1944 to provide help on the territories freed from the German occupation.

## In Allies Occupied Germany At Last

### Olga Gladky Verro

#### As Recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky

The next day the convoy train finally arrived to the station of Hanover and all passengers, women and children, were directed to the big former German camp that now was under the patronage of the English.<sup>1</sup> They checked only our Red Cross passes and registered only our names and the town where we were going. We were told that we could find for ourselves an empty bunk bed in the barracks and that we may stay in the camp and have some food from the kitchen until we depart to the cities of our destination to join our husbands. Many women and children, including my German companion and me, were so tired from the trip that we fell asleep as soon as we lay down on the bunk beds to rest.

When I woke up, my companion told me that we could find the information about our trains, or any other question we may have in the office. There I found out that to travel to Weinheim I had to request my husband to send me a document called *Zuzugebescheinigung* that would allow me to go from the English to the American zone of occupation.

I wrote immediately a short letter to my husband on the address of his friend in Weinheim asking him to mail me this document. I also wrote a letter to Lala and Giulio notifying them that I successfully arrived in Hanover, Germany. I also I wrote to Rufin and Lidia who were very interested in how my trip would end up.

Having the roof, bed, and food that Lidia gave me; I decided to wait in the camp for a document from my husband. The conditions in the camp resulted to be worse than they seemed to me on the first day. There was no heat in the barracks, no hot water, and

the food was scarce and almost worse than we had in Oelsnitz in the *Ostarbaitern* German camp during the war. I got a sore throat and, after standing on my feet in the train, my sciatica began to bother me. I waited for almost one week, but there was no news from my husband, not even a letter.

On November 1, 1946 I decided to take a risk and board the train to Weinheim with the ticket that I purchased already in Breslau. And everything went without any problems. No one bothered me or checked my documents, except the train ticket. I asked the conductor to tell me when I had to get off the train.

I arrived in Weinheim at night, toward the morning. On the station some people explained how to get to the house of Dmitri Tschabrischvili, my husband's friend,. It was not as hard to find it as I expected because of the darkness.

I knocked for a while on the fence gate, until I saw a light, one of the windows opened and a man asked in German what I wanted. I answered also in German, "I am the wife of Orest Gladky."

"A-a-a, we were waiting for you," he said now in Russian. "I will be right out."

He saluted me and did let me in the house. There he told me to sit on the chair in the kitchen and wait until he would get dressed. I sat there for a very long time, at least it seemed to me very long. Finally, he came all dressed up and said, "I will bring you right away with the first streetcar to your husband. He is waiting for you with impatience."

During the trip he recounted to me a little bit about my husband's life in the UNRRA camp. We arrived at the UNRRA camp's gate early in the morning and my husband's friend asked the guard to call my husband and tell him that his wife is waiting for him at the gate.

As we were waiting I observed that the camp resembled the hamlet in Laband with the apartment buildings, rather than the standard wooden barracks of the typical German camp.

Orest came immediately and as he saw me, the tears began to run on his cheeks and he was able only to say, "*Tonyechka*<sup>2</sup>... *Tonyechka*..." And we embraced each other.

My husband's friend admired our reunion scene and said, "Well, I told you that I will bring your woman here. I delivered her to you all in one piece. My job is accomplished."

"Thank you very much," my husband and I said together.

"Good-bye my friends," he said. "When you settle down, come to see me."

"Good-bye. And thank you again," we said.

I told my husband that I waited and waited to receive documents from him and was ready to take a risk to depart without it hoping that everything would come out all right. But at the last moment I received his Certificate that he sent through our daughter. It was required to have it for anybody who was returning to Germany but nobody actually checked out.

My husband took my suitcase and led me in his room. He was acting as a real host who was giving hospitality to the guest of honor. He didn't allow me to do anything saying to me, "You rest now, *Tonyechka*, you are tired after the long trip. You deserve to rest after the hard work you have done until now."

I was indeed exhausted from the difficult physical and emotional conditions during the trip and weakened by sore throat and a touch of sciatica that didn't improve in the cold barrack in the Hanover camp. Therefore, I allowed myself to rest in bed and

be cuddled and pampered by my husband. However, we talked incessantly, because we had so much to tell to each other about all that happened to us during almost two years since he left us in Laband on January 23, 1945.

The next day on November 4, 1946 I read all the letters that our daughter wrote to her father in Russian, in which I could understand many new details that she didn't write to me in French or in German. Immediately I wrote a letter<sup>3</sup> to her and Giulio telling them:

"You certainly would be surprised that your mother and grandmother in ten days found herself together with your father and grandfather. But this is true. I was a French woman, my husband was a German, and I was traveling with the Red Cross convoy train of German wives and families who were joining their husbands in Germany. The trip was very difficult. I had lost many items during the search on the border. The Polish border guards were very angry. But it was understandable."

I wrote Lala and Giulio that my departure happened unexpectedly, as it did happen with them. Notwithstanding, that I sold all my old rags and bought better things, I couldn't take it all with me and I left a lot of nice things with Rufin and Lidia. True, they said that it shall be all kept in safekeeping and, if there shall be the possibility, they would send it to Italy or to me. But I would have preferred that they sell it all and sent the money to them when it will be possible. I have left them also lots of money. In Breslau they have taken some more of my stuff, because it was impossible to take it all with me. And now I don't regret it, because the Polish border guards would have taken it anyway.

During the trip the Polish border guard has taken from me many nice things, but I was able to convince him to trade with me the cup with the butter, where at the bottom I hid my gold items, for big salami I had. I was traveling under the illegal conditions and it did cost me lots of money.

I told them that in general they departed under better conditions, at the right time, and quietly. I was only sorry that they didn't take with them more thing that could have been useful to them now.

I reassured Lala and Giulio, "Don't you worry about thinking that I was a burden for your friends. They would miss me, because they had fattened themselves on my provisions. Everybody was telling me about it, I am sure that they would remember me and would never forget me. With Rufin and Lidia we parted as friends. They saw me off as far as Breslau, Rufin up to the train, even if it was very difficult."

Although I was not registered yet in the UNRRA camp, I lived there with my husband in his room. I was resting but as always was restless. It seemed to me very strange to be without work and I was already searching for something to do. After living with Rufin and Lidia, it was a big change in my life, in general and in particular. But we are used to change.

For now we had enough food, because my husband was waiting for me and saved something. Now he was courting me as the young bride treating me with food and doing all housework by himself. It's true that after very difficult conditions in the German camp in Hanover I got sick and decided to lie in bed with sciatica.

I couldn't yet decide on my impression and I couldn't even tell myself yet, if I did the right thing to come here, but morally I felt satisfaction and, besides, it was also closer to my daughter. And this had also tempted me. The change in my life is tremendous. The conditions here are similar to those as we were living in the beginning in Laband, sharing the apartment with the others. Even the room is similar, only with one

window and with the iron stove.

When my husband tried to register me in the camp's office as his wife, there was a problem because we didn't dare to use our original documents, which all have been issued in the Soviet Ukraine. But in this UNRRA camp were accepted only DP's, who were either Polish or Ukrainians from Poland. In order to be accepted in this camp, all Ukrainians from the Soviet Ukraine, including my husband and his brother, had to state that they had lost their documents and they declared themselves for registration as the Ukrainians from Poland.

This was the only way that they could protect themselves from being transferred to the camp for the Soviet citizens. It was some kind of agreement that the Soviets made with the other Allies. Soviet NKVD was in charge of those camps and deported all captured "home", which meant to the concentration camps in the far regions of the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, my husband registered himself by changing spelling of his name as Orest Hladkyj (the name spelled in Ukrainian); born in 1902; and place of birth as Stanislawov, Poland; and residencies: lived in Stanislawov until 1920 and then from 1920 to 1924 lived in Lwov, Poland; from 1924 to 1943 lived in Sosnowice, Poland; from 1943 to 1945 lived in Labedi,<sup>7</sup> Poland."

As I arrived in the UNRRA camp where my husband was, I stayed there on the illegal condition. We had to prove that I am the wife of my husband. On November 7, 1946 I wrote to Lala and Giulio a letter<sup>8</sup> asking them to help us in this matter. I asked her if it was possible to send us a notarized certificate that shall be exactly of the following content:

"On the bases of the birth certificate of Olga Hladkyj, born on January 14, 1923, Orest Hladkyj, born on October 29, 1902 and Antonina Hladka, born on February 23, 1895, are her parents."

I warned her not to add anything to the text that I wrote, neither the nationality, nor the place of her birth, only what I wrote.

We were hoping that we would get this document soon since their last letter was in the mail only two weeks. I was so happy that now I would receive their letters quicker and more often.

They talk here that we may travel far from here to build the new life. Knowing how it was hard for my daughter in Italy, I asked her opinion, if she also would like to go somewhere else to live and to make the trip together with us. I had a secret desire to be together with her in the future, but I didn't know how it could be accomplished.

I certainly wouldn't want to depart too far, hoping that I could eventually see my daughter, Giulio, and my little granddaughter Lia whom I could only imagine from the big photo. If we shall travel far, we probably will not see each other again. Therefore, I was thinking that before a departure across the ocean I would try to make my way to Italy to see them. But if it is not possible, what we can do? Our situation here was very uncertain.

About Lala's and Giulio's departure with us, I wrote, "I agree with your father—we shall see about it. We shall be the pioneers and in general this is all for now very problematic, it is all in the air."

They had decreased the food rations in the camp, and in addition I am on the illegal condition here. However, even under these conditions I would like to find for me

some kind of work, because I cannot live without work.

I read and reread all letters my daughter wrote to her father and learned many new things about her life since had more details written in Russian.

I am looking all the time at Lia's photo<sup>4</sup> that I like very much where Giulio is with Lia, a picture with a contrast, a giant Giulio and a tiny daughter. Beautiful! Only Giulio could have thought to do it.

I congratulated Lala and Giulio with the birthday of their daughter Lia, and Lia, with her first birthday. I asked them to kiss her immediately and tell her that it is her *Baba* that is kissing her, and wish her health, from which depends all the rest in life.

As I was writing my letter, I realized how terrible I am talking and writing in Russian—I forgot it and here I have to talk Ukrainian and Russian. I imagined that my daughter probably had completely forgotten to speak Russian, too.

I was already twice downtown in Mannheim. The first time on November 4, I went there with my husband's roommate who lives in a separate room. I wanted to explore a possibility to find some work with the Americans. And the second time I went with Igor, to the home of Dmitri Zakharovich Tschabrischvili to see if there were any letters from Lala.

My daughter wrote us that we should begin to normalize our life. And I replied her that it was impossible. Our life was in a constant wandering from the time we got married. But I am happy that we are now together with her father and neither he, nor I would be bearing difficulties alone. But, isn't it true that by this time we should be used to such life?

My husband also wrote to my daughter a letter that was very similar in content to mine, but with some minor personal details. We mailed both letters together and waited now for a certificate, which we hoped she and Giulio could send to us. Meanwhile we were exploring other alternatives to prove that we were husband and wife for the purpose of registering me as a wife in the UNRRA camp in which my husband was living and working.

Here are some things that he wrote in his letter of November 4, 1946:

My dear ones! On November 1, as the bright sun, Mama appeared before me. Thank God, we are together and I hope, that in the near future we all, you and we, could gather together again. We have information that in January would depart the first party of DP's to Argentina. Maybe we are already blessed by God and we will depart there too. But now Mama is with me and I don't have to worry about anything.

My restless wife has already gone downtown. She is planning to find some job. But I want her to rest at least for a while. True, now there is a question of official registration, which is very long and I don't know if it is possible, but we need to try. I am sure that Mama would be able to succeed. But all of this should not influence our departure, if any.

For you also will be easier now, less letters to write, one for both of us. I hope that our correspondence would be more intensive now.

My paper about the '*Puppenmaister*' had decided the departure. I think that I mailed it to you for Mama. I don't know how I didn't think earlier about it. But, thank God, it came on time anyway.

How is your health? Lia's? Giulio's? And you work as usual? And, you are tired, as usual? Oh, how I would like to help you! But it is too far from here. That's why I would like that Giulio would think about the question of your emigration from Italy. He is a young man, seems to be energetic, and work is not a disgrace.

I am not talking obviously, that we have to live together because you would want to be a mistress of your house. But living close to us could be definitely very pleasant and practical. I am writing about the pleasant closeness based on what Mama told me about her life together with you and Giulio.

Of course, everything depends on Giulio. If he is taking a sober view of the present situation, if he believes in his own strength, if he wants to make his life more pleasant, with more material security, more safety, then, I think, he would decide to leave. Why not to try a fortune? You know, we have also left home to look for better life and happiness. And you have found yours already. And now, the three of you may look for new things if not the new happiness, but prosperity. The essence of the human life consists in this search.

Send us also yours and Giulio's photos. They give us many happy moments. You are very stingy for sending them. We will try with Mama to find out the way to make them too and will send them to you. However, here this is very difficult to do.

Dear girl, everybody here is sending you their regards. I kiss you dearly. My regards to family Verro.

Don't forget to write to us, you know we are now together. Again I kiss you all dearly, you, Giulio, and Lia.

Your Papa. Mannheim, November 4, 1946.

My husband told me about a long journey across Germany that he and his brother endured while fleeing from the advancing Red Army.<sup>9</sup> I also read his remorseful thoughts recorded in a notebook<sup>10</sup> that he kept during that time. It was very difficult to read it and recognize that my husband finally realized how much his political past and uncompromising views have determined the course of our lives.<sup>11</sup>

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1. As recounted by Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky and from her letters.

2. A diminutive of the name Antonina [in Russian].

3. Antonina G. Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law [in Russian] Mannheim, Germany. November 4, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

4. From the photograph of Lia with Giulio.

5. Orest M. Gladky. A letter to his daughter and son-in-law [in Russian]. Mannheim, Germany. November 4, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

6. In 1946 in the United Nations Eleanor Roosevelt debated Soviet delegate head, Andrei Vishinsky, regarding WWII refugee repatriation about the treatment of the Soviet citizens who were repatriated forcefully to the USSR and were punished by sending them to the concentration camps. The Delegate of the USSR to the United Nations, Comrade Vishinsky, replied to this by branding all the Soviet citizens who were in Germany as "...traitors, enemies of the people, and war criminals who must expiate their guilt with heavy forced labor..."

7. Laband [in German].

8. Antonina G. Gladky, letter to her daughter and son-in-law, Mannheim, Germany, November 7, 1946, private collection of Olga Gladky Verro.

9. Orest M. Gladky. "Putyevoy Journal" ["Travel Itinerary"].

10. Orest M. Gladky. Notebook kept during a journey across Germany, 1945-1946) See the

## The Happy News About My Parents Reunion

Olga Gladky Verro

November 10, 1946. Turin

My dear Mama and Papa!

I cannot believe that I can begin a letter with such greeting but it is true. And my first thought is to thank the Almighty for His mercy and help. My daughter is already one year old and it is one year that we left Mama and almost two years since our parting with my father. How much was endured... Fear, despair, unknown, and uncertainty have harassed and worn us out... Very strange months were gone by... Unbound happiness intertwined with sorrow... But He didn't leave us not even for one minute and worked wonders and saved us everywhere.

Dear Papka, first of all, you should forgive me for my inattentiveness – I didn't congratulate you yet with your birthday. It is already one week as *Giul'ka* is after me for this reason, and he is right by saying, "You are always saying 'I am busy' you should find the time for such things and leave everything else." But I am always the same. In the evening of November 29 we were talking about your birthday and remembered you and Igor, but only on October 10 I took a pen in my hand.

All week Lia was not well and on a diet and had lost weight. She has always some problems with the digestion—sometimes she throws up, sometimes has constipation, sometimes diarrhea. It seems that she does not digest well something. Of course, the nutrition with dry milk probably is the culprit. But she is strong and this helps her all the time.

She understands already everything, babbles all the time. Her preferred words sound like this, "Kudya, kudya, kudya," "mama," "nonyo," "nonya," (grandfather and grandmother), "no-no-no," "tata" (a girl), and "Nanna" (Yvana, her friend.) In addition she has many variations according to her mood. Then she waives her hand and says "mau-may" which means "ciao," and "amn" for "grazie" which means "thank you." She knows her potty and brings it to me when I ask her to do it; she dances as soon as she hears music, and she likes to play horsy. Well, it's enough you know yourself that one can go on without end describing the little ones.

Could you imagine, that I sew everything myself for Lia and for me. I finished sewing a winter coat for Lia and now next in turn a dress for her and winter underwear. There is plenty of work to fall dead-tired but it doesn't move fast enough and it makes me upset. But I must have patience. It is all because of the crowdedness and because of the quirks of the family members and the day's routine. I probably have written already the sequence in the days activities. The

morning is spent taking care of Lia, walking to buy milk, bread, and wine, diapers, putting the bedroom in order, and picking up all the "rugs" (clothing left from the previous evening).

My father-in-law goes to work at 12:30 pm and eats lunch at noon; Domenico arrives at 1:00 pm for lunch and Lia eats approximately at the same time, and the three of us [Giulio, his mother, and I] eat in-between.

From 2 pm to 3:30 pm and sometimes even until 4 pm the dishes are washed, kitchen is cleaned, floor is washed, and the supper is cooked and Lia eats one more time. Therefore, I cannot start doing anything else until 4:30 pm and until 6 pm could go ahead doing things that need to be done. After that arrives Giulio and we eat; at 8 pm arrives Domenico and at 9 pm the father-in-law; and when the dishes are washed it's already close to 10 pm. And if Lia is already sleeping, there are about 2 to 3 hours of work.

We were lucky, we found a little bed for Lia from Giulio's friends. They are very nice family; he is an engineer and was a teacher that Giulio had before[in the school preparing radiotelegraphers for the military]. They like Giulio and we visit them sometimes. By the way, they have some rich relatives in Argentina. This could be helpful—life is complicated and one needs to have contacts with people.

We are hoping this spring to get out of the family, but a hope is only that God will help us. For now we are thinking to settle in Italy, but if it will be necessary, Giulio will not leave me. Every day we are becoming closer more and stronger; and I can tell very boldly that there are not too many women in the world who are as happy as I am. Mama knows this and she will tell you about it.

I didn't know what to think because I wasn't receiving any more letters from Mama. Your letter, Papa, returned to me good spirits. Now I am waiting with impatience your letters. *Mamusya*, write about all your travels. Our dear ones, write us, we are waiting. Giulio and Lia are kissing you dearly and congratulating you, Papa. Greetings from the family Verro. My dear ones, I am embracing you tightly and kissing you. Your misbehaving *Lya'ka*.

## **Part Seventeen**

### **Living With In-Laws**



# The Cracked Jar

Olga Gladky Verro

That memorable to me Friday morning began with the usual chores that my mother-in-law and I did any day of the week, except on Sundays. My mother-in-law went to the open market and to the bakery shop to buy the produce and bread for the day. I took care of my daughter Lia's needs first, feeding her and getting ready for the day. Then I proceeded with the bedroom cleaning and dusting while I placed Lia on the small rug on the floor hoping that she would sit and play with her toys. Instead, she was crawling on the tile floor and getting under the bed and dresser. I had to pull her out from there and plea with her that the floor was cold and if she didn't wanted to get sick, she should remain sitting on the rug. Of course, being five-months-old, Lia couldn't understand my reasoning. Unless I held her in my arms or put her on the high chair, there is little that I could do—she was in the crawling stage. But the rules of the Verro's household required that we, the women, finish all the morning chores, get the food ready, and the table set before the men would arrive for lunch at 12:30.

On Fridays we usually had fish both for lunch and for supper. As in all working class families after the war, the housewives had to be thrifty. And my mother-in-law was able to cook economical meals to feed the three workinh men and two women. Very often she prepared the good-tasting dishes from the salted codfish that, although it required more time to prepare, was the least expensive fish at that time. It required to be soaked in the water for a full day and night and changed the water three or more times before cooking. Then it was either fried and served with fried potatoes and green sald, or cooked in a sauce made with sauted onions and tomatoes.

That morning my mother-in-law was nervous because she had a late start cooking. She was hurrying with the stove to have the right heat and get the codfish dredged with flour to be ready for frying in a big pan. Wher the olive oil began to sizzle she placed the codfish pieces into the pan and got out of the drawer the meat carving fork that had two long tines and long handle for turning the fish.

I helped her to peel the potatoes and began to cut them. She raised her voice, "*Dio mio*, how many times I showed you the "right" way of cutting them for frying? They are to thick! Do I have to do it all by myself?" I was sure that I was cutting them just as I did previously, but didn't want to make an issue of it and instead said calmly, "I will try to cut them more thinly, Mamma."

After I placed the potatoes in another pan on the stove already hot for frying, I began to wash the salad and again she found an opportunity to reproach me that I didn't change the water as many times as she wanted. And again I just changed the water one more time to keep her content

While I went on the balcony to shake the water from the salad wrapped in the towel, Lia was crawling on the kitchen floor. When I came back, I couldn't see her anywhere and got scared that maybe she sneaked out the door on the balcony. "Lia! Lia!Where are you," I called and began to look in the corners, under the sofa, and finally

found her behind the sewing machine and under the cupboard. I pulled her out and held her in my arms reproaching her for not sitting on the rug.

As I stood near the cupboard, I glanced casually through the glass doors at the good dishes and glasses that were stored there and were used only on festive occasions. There were also a few other treasured items that my mother-in-law was keeping from everyday use. Right in the middle on the bottom shelf stood a large glass jar that was given to her by somebody; it was made of a thin glass and seemed to be from some store-bought product, either honey or pickled vegetables. In about six months that I lived with the family I never saw it being used, but it was washed with all the other good dishes and glasses before Christmas as a ritual pre-holiday cleaning of the apartment.

Suddenly, I noticed a long crack on one side of the jar and tried to examine it from a different angle thinking that it could be a reflection from other items on the shelf. But, there was no mistake, it was a crack. Without thinking about the consequences I said, "Mamma, the jar is cracked."

"What jar?" she asked impatiently without turning her head as she was turning with the long fork the frying fish in the pan.

"The jar that you keep in the cupboard."

She turned sharply toward me and the cupboard and screamed, "What have you done? My beautiful jar! I preserved it for many years and you cracked it!"

"I didn't touch it, Mamma, I just saw it now that it is cracked."

But she rushed toward me pointing the long fork in her hand and continued to scream, "My beautiful jar! My beautiful jar! What have you done to it?!"

I saw the long fork pointed toward me and Lia in my arms and quickly jumped behind the table and sofa protecting my daughter's head with one hand. Mamma followed me screaming and pointing the fork. Now I got really scared and without hesitation ran toward the door and out on the balcony. She followed me screaming and pointing the fork. I ran the whole length of the balcony and turned around the corner to the other side then quickly jumped into the door of the neighbor and shut the door behind me. Mamma didn't dare to follow me there. The surprised neighbor asked me what happened.. I was able only to say, "My mother-in-law... My mother-in-law..." She looked out through the door window and said, "She is gone in her apartment."

After I told her what happened, she reassured me, "Don't you worry, she wouldn't dare to come here. You can stay here until your husband comes home."

The young woman was from the region of Trieste, a region where the population was mixed—Italian and Germans. After the war Trieste was given by the Allies to Austria and the Italians were forced to leave. I don't remember her first name because everybody was calling her just Triestina.

I stayed in her apartment until Giulio came home for lunch. Of course, he was informed by his mother with her version of the incident. He came all upset with his mother's complaint about my unpredictable reaction to his mother's "innocent" reproach for damaging her precious jar. I tried to explain to him that running after me and Lia in my arms with the pointed long fork was not an innocent reproach. That I was really scared that she could do real harm to me and to Lia. "Nonsense," replied Giulio. "Grandmother would never do any harm to her granddaughter. Any way I have calmed down my mother and we can return home and to eat now—I don't have much time

before returning back to work.”

“But I never touched the jar and didn’t cracked it,” I tried to justify myself.

“It doesn’t matter,” he replied, “There is no way to convince my mother otherwise if she believes that you did it. Just forget about it—I told her that I would buy for her another jar that is even prettier than the one she had. So, it is settled now and she would not bother you any more about it.”

We returned to the apartment where Babbo already finished his lunch and was reading the *Unita* newspaper. Domenico already left because he had a long trip in the streetcar to get back to work. We silently eat our lunch and I fed Lia then put her to sleep. When Giulio left, I helped to clear the table and Mamma sat as usual for her after lunch nap before we washed the dishes and she washed the floor. We did our afternoon chores in silence and I talked only with Lia when she woke up after her afternoon nap.

For couple of days after the incident my mother-in-law and I spoke very little only those things that needed to be said. I wished that I could get away from that place but there was no way to find the apartment for us at that time. I began to make the short visits in the afternoon to the Triestina and shared with her my frustration. She was a sympathetic listener and also shared with me her pain of being forced to leave her nice home and her possessions in Trieste and become a refugee in her own country.

My mother-in-law was suspicious of my becoming too friendly with Triestina and complained to Giulio that I was gossiping with neighbor about family. But Giulio reassured her that it was good for both of us—for her to have me out of the house for a while and for me to have a friend of my own age.

# The Underbaked Bread Buns

Olga Gladky Verro

My mother-in-law moods were unpredictable. Some days she was nice and we worked together smoothly managing household chores according to the established routine. But on some days no matter what I did, everything was not done as she expected and she continuously reproached me that I was doing things “in a foreign way” and complaining, “Do I have to do everything over the ‘right way’?”

On those days I was asking God for what sins He was punishing me for and couldn't find the answer. I wished to leave that apartment but there was no way we could do it—there was the scarcity of places to rent in town and we could not afford not only the rent prices but there was an enormous cost to pay the landlords for the so-called *buon-entrata*, or the right to rent the apartment. And, although Giulio had very good pay for the worker, he was giving everything to his mother and we couldn't even think about saving little by little for this purpose—all was used for the family needs according what she considered to be the priorities.

It was the second year that we lived in the family. Lia was already walking and required less supervision. We agreed with Giulio that without my working we would never be able to have the money for *buon-entrata*. We decided to ask Mamma if she could take care of Lia if I find some job and save the money for this purpose. She agreed that it was a good idea and Giulio began to inquire about the job openings in places he was familiar with.

The unemployment in Italy after the war was very high and one needed connections and references from important people to find the jobs. Giulio was reluctant to look for me for the factory jobs. One day he found some place where they were looking for the Italian-German translator and they asked me to take a test. Although I already spoke Italian without difficulty, I had no formal education in Italian language and couldn't qualify for that job. Another job that Giulio was able to find was at the stockings factory but I was disqualified because of my eyesight – wearing glasses. Time was going by quickly and Giulio's search had not produced any other openings.

I was frustrated and one day at the end of March 1947, when we finished our afternoon chores I put my coat on and told my mother-in-law that I was going out too look for the job in the neighborhood.

Not too far from where we lived on the Corso Novara going down in the direction toward the hills and the Mount Superga there were many factories. That's where I went to look that day. I was not discriminating—I entered all that I found on my way—large or small, clean or dirty buildings or courtyards, friendly or unfriendly office employees. Everywhere was the same answer, “There are no openings now. Leave your name and address—we will notify you when we need workers.” So, I left my name and address as they asked and discouraged was returning home.

It was a cold and windy day. As I walked from the glue factory, the last place I visited, I had my coat collar up protecting my nose from breathing the terribly smelling

air coming from it's chimney. I left my name there, too. I was walking immersed in my thoughts "Oh, how I would like to have my own quiet little corner but... we cannot afford it. And I prayed, God, I don't care to work even there, as long as they offer me the job, Please God, help me to find the job! Any job...No matter how unpleasant or difficult it could be. Please, help me to find the job..."

Suddenly I heard someone calling my name, "Signora Verro, is it you?" I looked in that direction across the street—it was Signor Bagero returning home from work—the street where he lived was just around the corner from where he was. One more minute and he would have turned into it. He walked across the street and saluted me.

"What are you doing here," he asked.

"Well, I went to all the factories located on this street looking to find the job for me. We need to find the apartment and without me working we cannot save the money needed for it—they are asking from sixty to one thousand liras for the *buon-entrata* and about one thousand liras per month for rent. It is impossible for us to save so much money and to pay for rent without me working."

"Did you find anything here?"

"Well, they took my name and address everywhere I stopped by. And at the glue factory they told me that they would notify me if they need workers."

He asked in disbelief, "Did you go also to the glue factory? It is a very dirty job there."

"I don't care," I said resolutely, "if they give me the job, I will take it! We need to have our own apartment and there is no other way—I need to have the job."

"Well, good luck to you," he said, "but try to select a better place than the glue factory."

We saluted each other and I asked him to give my regards to his wife and daughter whom I didn't see for a while.

Many weeks went by after that day when I looked in the neighborhood for the job. No results whatsoever, nobody notified me that they needed workers. No hope. Although Giulio was trying to reassure me that eventually we will find the job and the apartment, he didn't had to live all day with his mother and, I think, couldn't fully understand how depressing it was for me. He had learned from childhood the obedience and how to deal with his mother's changeable moods. He genuinely loved her and was able to compromise or sometimes to dismiss her unreasonable demands by giving her a hug or a kiss on the cheek. But I grew up with the parents who respected me and my needs and I couldn't get used to the dictatorial way my father-in-law and mother-in-law treated me. And my nerves were getting more and more stretched. And there was always so much to do for the whole family.

In a letter to my mother written on the fifth of May 1947 I wrote:

It seems that I didn't write to you for an entire century. I am dashing around like a squirrel in the wheel but it seems that I am not doing enough. Of course, with our big family there is enough work and I simply have to steal the time for sewing. In addition, the weather had not cooperated instead of a spring summer had begun. In April it got up to 30.5 C, even for them it was very strange.

But the things that are happening to Giulio trouble me and this is happening already the second time. Last night I was not feeling well and I called on him—when he

came close to the bed in the dark, he fainted and fell on the floor. When this happened the first time, the doctor made a thorough examination but couldn't find any illnesses. His diagnosis was: "General weakness, sensitive character, and in the past he probably had some kind of fearful experience that now is manifesting in this way." He suggested that he needs tranquility and general reinforcement of the organism. But in our family one cannot find tranquility.

On the first Saturday in the beginning of May, 1947 my mother-in-law was sulky from early in the morning, and did everything in defiance and all for trifle things. She was late coming back from the market and in order to start cooking, she didn't go to buy the bread as she usually did every day.

I came with her several times to the bakery and was embarrassed to hear how overbearing she was with the baker.

"Don't cheat me today," she would tell him, "Yesterday you gave me the underbaked buns. My husband was furious with me—with his dentures he couldn't chew them—they were all sticky inside."

"Madama," the baker would reply, "I could never make you happy, you are the only one who complains all the time. I make the best bread in the neighborhood."

"Well, you don't know my husband, if he said the buns were underbaked, it means they were raw and underbaked—I couldn't argue with him!"

I could see that the baker dreaded just to see her entering the shop. She would demand the buns with the nice crust by pointing to each, "Give me that one over there. Yes. And the other one next to it.... No, no, not the one you are holding—my husband wouldn't like that—it is too pale."

"Madama," the baker would reply, "they all came out of the oven at the same time, they are all baked well."

The morning that my mother-in-law was late from the open market she ordered me to go to the bakery to buy the bread.

"Please don't forget," she instructed me shaking her forefinger right under my nose, "you should demand the baker to give you the well baked buns. Tell him that they are for Madama Verro. He knows what kind of bread to give me. And watch what he gives you, if the bun is with the pale crust, tell him to exchange it for the ones with the right color crust."

That's what I told the baker and it seems to me that he was giving me the nice buns and there was no need to complain. That's until I entered the apartment and my mother-in-law asked me to show her the buns.

"Dio mio!" she screamed throwing all buns on the table. "Couldn't you do anything right! Didn't you see what he was giving you? They are all pale as the kitchen wall! Wait until Babbo comes home and sees those buns, he will be mad as hell! You better bring that bread back and tell the baker to exchange it."

"Mamma," I interrupted her, "they look all right to me."

"I told you to bring them back and ask him to exchange them." She ordered, "And they better be good with the right color crust."

Lia came close and looked at both of us not understanding what was going on. She only understood that her grandmother was accusing her mother in doing something wrong.

"I am not going back, Mamma." I replied calmly If you don't like the buns, you go and bring them back."

She didn't expected from me such answer and furiously grabbed one bun and threw it on the floor. Then she began to utter all kinds of accusations against me.

"You are good for nothing, one cannot delegate you even a simple chore of buying bread. My poor son, he wants to have an apartment and to live with you—you will ruin him and my little girl with your foreign ways!.. My poor son, look what kind of a woman he found in the foreign country. He had so many nice girls here who would marry him at once if he just asked them... One girl was sending him the letters all smelling with expensive perfume... Even his fiancée was able to cook, clean the house, and sew anything even the men's pants..."

She continued her accusations and complaints about me until I screamed at her, "Mamma, stop it!" Then I grabbed Lia in my arms and ran into the bedroom leaving my mother-in-law to continue her long winded speech for some time.

Tenderly holding my little daughter in my arms and walking back and forth from the kitchen door to the window, I cried. Seeing that her mother was in distress Lia began to cry, too. I calmed her down by lulling her and telling her in a soothing voice, "Dear girl, today is Saturday, your Papà would be home soon and everything will be alright." Just hearing the name "Papà" was enough to calm her down. So we waited in the bedroom until Giulio came home from work.

As Giulio opened the entrance door he was overwhelmed with his mother's complaints. I could hear only the fragments, "My poor son... my poor Giulio... your foreign wife is good for nothing... one cannot send her even to buy the bread... look at those underbaked buns....I was right to reprimand her, but she raised her voice at me and hid herself in the bedroom. ...The table is not set and your father will be home soon." She was going on and on.

Then I heard Giulio saying, "What are you complaining about? What is wrong with this bread?"

"Don't you see, it is underbaked!"

"Mamma, don't exaggerate, you don't know how the underbaked bread looks like. It is the kind of bread I, your son, ate for two years as a prisoner of war. You are making an issue out of nothing."

"About nothing! Wait until Babbo comes, you will hear his complaining that it is raw inside and he cannot chew it. And your wife..."

Giulio interrupted her brusquely, "Mamma, it is enough! Stop complaining about Lala. It is not enough that you complained so much about Bianca until Domenico left her? Do you want to do to me what you have done to him, to separate me from my wife?"

"Are you accusing me for your brother's leaving his wife?" she screamed, "Remember, your brother got the sixteen-years-old girl pregnant and it was I who insisted that he married her. Your father and Domenico wanted only to recognize the paternity of the child."

"Maybe so, but after they were married, you never stopped to complain that she was 'vain and good for nothing, that she couldn't cook, sew, or take care of the house, that her mother was doing everything.' Domenico told me that he couldn't stand any more to hear your complaints about Bianca."

"This is preposterous, to hear such accusations from my son." And she began cursing

him. Giulio couldn't endure after she slandered me and him with so many disgusting accusations. And then his father came home. I could hear from the bedroom that he also began to shout like madman. Luckily by this time Lia was sleeping. Giulio came to the bedroom and told me to go to the very nice neighbor, Triestina, and stay there until they would calm down.

When I returned, they suddenly began shouting again and the father slapped Giulio on the cheek. After that Mother stated, "If you wouldn't had returned home, I would have suffered less than being wronged by you in such a way."

Hearing such words from his mother was too much for Giulio, who was always very restrained and patient, he couldn't hold back and got carried away.

"Well, I had enough! You wished that I would never got home—we are getting out of here now!" Then he said to me, "Lala, put your coat on—we are leaving this place right now."

"Lia is sleeping. Are we leaving her here?" I asked.

"Don't worry, she will be fine," replied Babbo who by this time calmed down and seemed to be surprised by Giulio's decision to leave.

"Where are you going?" Mother asked revealing her worry.

"Never mind, I have my weekly pay in my pocket—there are plenty of rooms in the hotels."

Giulio opened the kitchen door and allowed me to get out first. We encountered Domenico on the staircase. Wondering, he asked, "Where are you going?"

"We are getting out of here," replied Giulio, "You will hear what happened from our dear mother."

"Do you need some money?" asked Domenico.

"No, I have my weekly pay with me. But keep in mind—I may need it in the near future. Ciao!"

We walked out of the apartment building in silence and started to talk only when we were already on Corso Palermo. "There is a cheap hotel not very far from here," said Giulio, "We could stay for a few days there until we find a furnished room somewhere under the mansard roof—those are the only one that could be found now and it will be very expensive."

We entered the cheep-looking hotel. "Pay in advance," the clerk said and asked, "For how many hours?" as if it was the usual way that couples rented the rooms there.

"For one night," replied Giulio. "But we may stay longer if tomorrow we don't find the room for rent."

The clerk looked at us with surprise and told Giulio how much it would cost, cashed the money and gave us the key and towels.

The room was on the first floor, it was clean but smelled heavy with tobacco. The bedspread and furniture looked heavily used. The small window with the old curtain looked into the small courtyard obstructed by the high brick wall of the tall building. There was only one chair and we sat on the bed.

Giulio embraced me. "Here we are, *Il dado e tratto*," he used the famous words of Julius Ceasar ('The die is cast—I can't turn back').

I wanted to explain to him what happened, but he stopped me, "There is nothing to explain—my mother said enough—she would have preferred me not to return home from Germany and not to know anything about me, if I was dead or alive... I don't

recognize my mother—I never knew her to be like this. But it's the time for us to get out."

I washed my face and splashed the cold water in my eyes to freshen up the eyelids swollen from crying. And we solemnly discussed what and how we should do to organize our new life.

"The first thing, we have to do is to ask Mamma and Babbo, Giulio said, "if we could leave Lia with them because there would be very cold under the mansard roof where usually have only the iron stove. We cannot endanger Lia's health."

I was not too happy to leave my daughter with them but accepted his idea that, if they agreed, it would be safer for her.

"The second thing, we have to find for you the job and to save money for the *buon-entrata* if we find some apartment for rent."

"We are trying to find the job for me for long time. Why do you think that we would find it now?"

"Bacause, as the saying goes, "When God closes one door, He opens somewhere else the window."

"We needed it for some time. Why God didn't open it before?" I asked again.

"Maybe it was not the right time yet."

"I hope that it is the right time now."

We remained in the hotel room for couple of hours talking about all kinds of possibilities to solve our problem. Giulio thought that he could ask to be transferred by STIPEL to work somewhere in the small town where the housing situation was better. Or maybe we should find the place to live in some neighboring village and Giulio could commute with the train to work in the city. Of course, we decided that the furnished room under the mansard roof was the first choice for now—we had no furniture. And then was the search for any kind of job—Giulio should forget finding for me work in the office.

In late afternoon we calmed down. Giulio decided to go home and get his pygamas and my nightgown and a change of underwear and clothing for tomorrow and for Monday. I remained in the room and prayed God to help us in any way possible.

Giulio came back empty-handed and all smiling. As soon as he entered the room, he announced in a happy voice, "Dear Lala, you wouldn't believe when I tell you the news. During our absence came Signor Bargerò. He asked us to come this evening to his home to talk about the job he found for you .He said that it should be done quickly."

"In the person of Signor Bargerò God opened another window," I said.

"My mother said to me, 'You will be crazy if you would risk to loose this job.'She was so excited and seems to have completely forgotten the quarrel that we had. She offerd to take care of Lia while you are at work, under the condition that we would help her with the chores at home in the evenings, on Saturdays and Sundays. And I agreed. So, let's go home and thank her for the offer."

Giulio said that when he came home, the Father had alredy returned to work. Mother warned Giulio to expect that the things with his father would not change for the better soon and will remain very tense for a while.

That evening we made a visit to Bargerò's. He gave us the good news, he found for me the job in a small factory. He knew the owner and asked from him a favor to hire me.

"You have to present yourself at eight o'clock Monday morning," He said, "Here is

the address and instructions on how to get there with the streetcar. They will test you and if you can use the screwdriver to assemble small miscellaneous electrical devices, such as switches, plugs, sockets, and outlets, you have the job. Of course, I knew that you can use the screwdriver—you told us about kind of work you did in Germany. According to the promises of the owner, he should place you on the assembly of these items.”

Signora Bagero, as always, was very kind and knowing our situation suggested that now we could loan the money for the *buon-entrata* and to repay the loan monthly with my salary. And she advised us to look for an apartment close to Giulio’s parents so it will be convenient to bring Lia to her Nonna. “It will not be easy for you to work this out,” she said, “, but Giulio is a good man and I trust he will help you in everything.”

On Monday I began my job at the factory...

## Accusations Against Giulio and Mariuccia

Olga Gladky Verro

Domenico began his business from the scratch when the first fluorescent lights tubes just started to arrive from the United States. Colonel Volpe gave him a few samples and asked him to run around the town and offer to the merchants and businesses the new economical way to illuminate their shops, offices and factories. He didn't needed the capital for the investment—all he needed is to run errands for the Colonel Volpe on Saturday's and after work at Rabotti factory. He was to benefit not only by a percentage of the tubes sold but also by making the electrical installations needed for this new type of illumination.

Right away it was obvious that telephone was essential for Domenico's new business. Since he lived with his parents who never had the phone, he asked to use his brother to use his phone instead. Giulio, as the STIPEL telephone company employee, had a free phone installed in our apartment entrance hall. For Domenico it was an inexpensive way to get advantage of this commodity.

As Domenico's business started to grow, he left the job at the Rabotti and dedicated himself to develop his business. Also, it was not enough for him to have the samples to show to the prospective customers—he needed also a place to store the fluorescent tubes of all sizes to have them available for quick delivery to the impatient customers who wanted to show off that their businesses were up-to-date with the new technology from America.

As the customers got hold of his phone number, Domenico needed someone to answer the telephone. By this time I was at home having left my work at the factory after my son Piero was born. He asked me if I would answer the phone and call him across the courtyard from our first story apartment to the fourth story. I agreed. So, from the balcony I would scream several times, "Domenico! Phone!" until he would appear out the door and rush down the steps to our phone.

As the business began to flourish, and the customers got used to my voice and I learned their names, I began to be a full-time telephone receptionist and was recording the names and telephone numbers of the customers and give them to Domenico. Now, he was not waiting any more in the apartment of his parents but either was delivering the tubes or working on the installations.

Soon he needed more help with the growing installation jobs and Giulio was available on Saturday afternoons and after work and was helping him when needed. Since Domenico had a backlog in receiving payments from the customers, Giulio and Domenico agreed that he will not pay him by the hour or right away after the job was completed, but rather he would pay him when we needed the money for some unexpected or planned expenses.

He helped us in advancing down payment for such such big expenses as the kitchen set; for the repairs of Lambretta motorscooter and later on for the purchase of the new one; and there were many other expenses that from time to time we needed

and could not squeeze out from Giulio's pay. It worked very well for both, Domenico was always there when we needed. And Giulio was always there when his brother needed him.

As the business began to flourish, Domenico rented a shop in the nearby sidestreet. At that time Mariuccia also left Rabotti factory and was tending the shop while Domenico delivered merchandise or worked on installation with the help of an electrician he hired.

Mariuccia didn't get regular pay either because the electrician had the priority for the weekly pay. So, until her mother was alive and she lived with her, Domenico had to give her some amount weekly according to how much cash he had on hand. In fact, Giulio told me that Domenico should include her as a business partner because she contributes so much to his business. Especially, she worked all day on another job they found - making the so called *truccioli*, a plastic comb binding strips that they molded into coils for spiral book binding. And that job was bringing immediate cash essential to the business.

Well, one evening when Domenico had a rush order for the binding coils, after the supper Giulio went to help them in the shop. I finished with the evening chores, put Piero and Lia to sleep and finally could sit quietly and do some sewing. Suddenly I heard banging on the door. *It couldn't be Giulio*, I thought, *he has the keys*. The banging on the door continued and as I walked across the hall, I heard, "Open the door! Open the door!"

I pushed the curtain on the door window and saw my mother-in-law who was gesticulating with her hands and continued to scream, "Open the door!" I turned the key and she barged in pushing me out of her way. She looked so excited that I asked her right away, "What did happen? Why are you so upset?"

She proceeded to the kitchen and shouted, without paying any attention to Lia who was sleeping on the sofa-bed. "Where is Giulio? I need to talk to him!"

"Hi is in Domenico's shop," I replied, keeping my voice down, "They are all working on the big order of *truchioli*."

"Of course, that's how they dupe him—they are all 'working' there," she said with sarcasm, "They are all sucking the money from my poor Domenico who cannot make money for himself!" she was so loud that Lia woke-up, sat on her bed looking at her grandmother and not understanding what was going on.

"Mamma," I tried to stop her, "please don't shout, you will wake up also Piero." And I closed the door to the bedroom. But there was no way of stopping her.

"Every time I ask him the money for the week, he doesn't have enough money because he has to pay 'other people' first before he pays himself! The electrician, Mariuccia, Giulio—all of you are taking advantage of Domenico's good nature and get out of him money, money, money!" And with each repetition of "money" her arms and hands moved as if she was grabbing it from the air. "Could you tell me, what kind of a business it is when he doesn't have enough money to pay for his food?"

"Mamma, listen," I interrupted her, "There is no use talking to me about it."

"Listen, who is talking? I know that you together with your husband conspire to extort as much money as you can from your brother-in-law! I know you! But I didn't expect that Giulio would do such thing to his brother!"

"Mamma!" I interrupted her also raising my voice, "Giulio, Mariuccia, and Domenico, are all in the shop now. There is no use talking to me. Go and talk to them!"

"Oh, 'that woman' is also there?" (She never called Mariuccia by her name but by calling her "that woman" she really meant "that bad woman") "If she is there, I certainly will go and tell her what she deserves to be told—to stay away from my poor son and stop using him!"

"Go, go and talk to them while they are all together," I prompted her hoping that she just leave me in peace. And my suggestion worked. As she was walking in the hall, she was still talking loud about her poor son Domenico being duped by all of us.

As soon as I locked the door, I got on the phone and call the shop. It was Domenico who answered. I told him that his mother was here and made a big scene accusing Giulio and Mariuccia sucking the money from "her poor Domenico" who is being used by all people around him. And that she was walking toward the shop to make the scene there.

"Thanks for notifying me," he said, "I will be ready when she comes here."

When Giulio came home that evening he said that Domenico advised them about his mother's unannounced visit to the shop after making the scene with me. And he told them that he would take care of her when she arrives. He encountered his mother at the door and didn't allowed her to enter the shop. He got outside and asked her what she wanted. When she said that she had to talk to all of them, he told her that they all were very busy finishing the job for tomorrow and that they probably would not go home well after midnight. Therefore, they had no time listening to anything she had to tell them. He advised her that she should go home and, if she had anything important to say, she should find another time for it.

"What it was all about that my mother again had to complain?" Giulio asked. I told him about her accusing him and Mariuccia of "sucking the money from her poor son Domenico."

"According to Domenico, it is my mother who tries to get more money from him now that he is in business for himself—she thinks that he is giving it all away and spending it and doesn't save anything. But, she thinks that if he gives her more money, she would save it for him for the things he needs." However, Giulio as usual tried to justify his mother's behavior, "You know, Babbo always gave her the money and allowed her to manage it and she did the good job with it feeding and clothing the family. Now she wants to mange Domenico's money. But she doesn't understand that managing business is different from managing the household."

Nrxt day when Giulio made his regular evening visit to his mother, he returned all upset as it was happening every time after his mother's complaints. I asked him, "Well, what happened?"

"Don't ask—you know what it was all about. She needs to pour her anger at sobebody and I am the only one who would listen to her. You know how Domenico is—he just told her that he doesn't want to hear about it and walked out. I couldn't calm her down this time. It would take some time for her to get used that she cannot mange Domenico's money. But now I would hear this from her for some time and be patient—she is my mother—and someone had to be patient with her. But this timeshe feels that I am using my brother and she doesn't want listen to me how our arrangements with Domenico work. She just needs time to get used to it and to calm down."

"But it is always Giulio who had to endure listening to his mother's complaints," I

said embracing him.

# The Mink Coat and the Shawl

Olga Gladky Verro

Not all of Domenico's customers were prompt in paying their bills. One of them was a well-known Turin's furrier. Domenico got tired of going there asking to be paid. The furrier excused himself by not having cash to pay Domenico for the installation of the fluorescent lighting in the store and shop. "Fur business after the war is not as it used to be," he claimed, "I hardly can pay my bills to the wholesalers—if I don't pay them, I will lose my business and you get nothing at all." The furrier offered him to take a fur coat as a payment, "Domenico, you can sell it probably for much more than your bill is—just pick any one you see hanging in the shop, any one you like."

Well, Domenico did just that—he picked a beautiful mink coat and gave it as a present to his girlfriend Mariuccia who was overwhelmed with the unexpected luxury gift. It need to be said, that Mariuccia, Domenico's girlfriend from their partisan period activity in Italy, left her job at Rabotti factory and was working as a full and indispensable partner with Domenico in his business.

Domenico rented in the nearby side street a room on the ground floor and equipped it as a shop and storage for the merchandise, fluorescent light fixtures and electrical supplies. She was in charge of taking telephone orders for merchandise delivery and for installation work, which now was occupying Domenico and one good electrician he hired to work full time. They also added a side work of making as they call it the *truccioli*, a plastic comb binding strips that they molded into coils for spiral book binding on an electrically heated machine. That kept her busy in between the telephone calls.

At that time Domenico still lived with his mother who expected every week to be paid for the living expenses by her son. One week he didn't have any cash to give her and told her that he would give her the money next week because he had enough cash only to pay his worker.

He explained that that ruffian furrier tricked him to accept the payment in kind rather than in cash. And added that indeed it was a good deal because the mink fur he got from him costs much more than he owed him.

"Well, where is the fur coat?" Asked his mother, "Let's see if it is really so expensive."

Without thinking about his mother's reaction, he said, "I gave it as gift to Mariuccia."

"What?" she screamed, "You gave it to Mariuccia? Are you crazy? You need cash and you are giving such expensive gifts! And to whom, to that woman!"

"Mamma," interrupted her Domenico, "don't start with your usual maligning of Mariuccia!"

"Didn't you think," she continued without paying any attention to her son's warning, "that your mother deserved the fur coat more than the woman who keeps you from reconciling with your wife? Who is taking care of you? I cook for you, I wash your

clothes—you are living here served like a prince! And who gets the reward? The woman who had ruined your life!"

Domenico knew that when his mother starts her complaining, there is nothing in the world that will stop her. When he got enough of it, he took his coat and simply walked out of the door—as he usually dealt with his mother's outbursts.

He went to the fur merchant and bought on credit for her a long and wide rectangular mink shawl and presented it to his mother, "Here, Mamma, you are right, you deserve to wear a mink after all you do for me." He opened the package and wrapped the shawl around her shoulders. "Here, feel how soft it is and go and look in the mirror how it is becoming to you."

"What is it?" she exclaimed, "It is a long piece of lined fur skin! Where would I wear it? Are you making fun of me?" And she sharply pulled it off and threw on the floor. "Do you want your mother to become a laughing stock wearing this odd thing? Aren't you ashamed of it?"

Domenico, as it s his usual way of dealing with his mother's arguments without answering, got his coat and walked out. But this time he was really upset. He came to our apartment, told the whole story and concluded, "I am not going back there and will sleep in the shop. Let her cool down. After she calms down for couple of days, she would regret her action." And indeed he slept in the shop for several nights and didn't come to eat his meals.

Mamma managed to make peace with Domenico by bringing him the meals to the shop. On the other hand, Domenico didn't have any other place to stay but his mother's apartment.

But Mamma never wore the mink shawl—for many years she kept it covered with mothballs in her wardrobe.

# Mother-in-Law's Dress

Olga Gladky Verro

My sewing for Lia and me was not only helpful for our budget but showed me the possibilities for earning some money if only I could find a way to learn how to make patterns and advanced sewing techniques. At that time there were no commercial patterns sold, except some patterns included as the monthly supplements in women's magazines and there was no choice of style or what kind of clothing was available that month. And one needed to know how to adjust them to individual measurements.

During my visits to Signora Bargerò she supplied me with some of the patterns for children's and women's clothing that she preserved through the years of subscribing to the magazines. She felt that I was sewing pretty good without ever having learned the skills from anybody. I told her that I was handy with the needle from the time I sewed for my doll and that I observed my grandfather tailoring men's clothing. She told me that she knew someone who was teaching sewing and patternmaking in her home. She arranged for me to attend the Rosetta Sampo Fashion School. To pay for it I did some sewing for my neighbors who also took care of Lia and Piero while I was attending classes.

My mother-in-law criticized me, "One doesn't need to attend the school to learn sewing, one needs to work with the dressmaker. Who ever heard that a wife and mother of two small children would go to school?"

She complained to Giulio; "Your wife is neglecting the children leaving them with the neighbors. And also neglecting your home. I went several times in the apartment while she was at school—the furniture was not dusted and the bedroom floor needed to be waxed. And when she goes to school after lunch, she leaves the dishes in the sink and the kitchen floor unwashed."

But Giulio was confident that I would succeed and defended my decision to learn. However, he insisted that I got up earlier in the morning and did all the chores so his mother wouldn't have anything to complain.

Having mechanical drafting course in Moscow Power Institute was an enormous help in learning quickly and easily pattern drafting. My teacher put me soon to help her drafting patterns for her clients and it did not only helped me to learn sooner how to draft variety of styles but also reduced my tuition for more advanced classes. By the time I completed most of the available classes, except for the lingerie and men's clothing, I felt very confident in drafting patterns for any style for ladies and children's wear.

My first customers were my neighbors who helped me to accomplish it: Nina and Ida, both my next doors neighbors, and a young woman who lived on the other side of the balcony who helped me before with shopping on the market when I needed when Piero was a baby and who had also a little girl that played with Lia.

My mother-in-law from whom I borrowed the sewing machine was jealous that I was sewing for my neighbors, but she didn't trust me yet to sew for her, or didn't

wanted to recognize that I learned so quickly the trade.

Then I sewed a cotton dress for Nina, who was a large and fat woman, but I selected a style with buttoned down front with the six gores skirt and made a pattern that fitted her so well that everybody complemented my work. Well, it didn't take long for my mother-in-law to notice it, too. So she came to me and said, "I would like you to sew for me the same style dress as you sewed for Nina. How much fabric I should buy?"

I agreed and told her that I would take her measurements and make the pattern first to calculate the exact length so she will not buy more fabric that is needed and not spend as much money if I told her just by guessing.

As I was taking all the measurements I needed to make the custom-fitted pattern, she complained, "My God, how many measurements do you need for making a dress? The real dressmaker would not need so many and she will know right away how much fabric is needed for that dress."

"Well, I am not yet a real dressmaker," I replied, "I am still learning and that's the way the teacher taught us to do it."

That evening I drafted her pattern on the old newspapers and calculated the lengths for different width of fabric and in the morning gave her a list of how much fabric she should buy if the fabric had some woven designs or prints that she would find on the market.

She arrived with the fabric and deposited it on my kitchen table saying, "The merchant told me that I don't need as much as you told me to buy, I saved some money by listening to her advice—she sells the fabric all the time and knows better than your calculations. As I was bargaining with her about the price per meter, she just looked at me and said, 'Madama, you don't need that much of a fabric if you made the skirt with just slight flare. You will not even look good if it has too much flair.'"

"Did you tell her what style dress you wanted?"

"Yes, yes, I told her that it will be buttoned all the way if front."

"How about the six gores skirt, did you tell her that?"

"No, I agreed with her that I wouldn't look good in the flared skirt."

"Well, if you wanted six gores skirt with very little flare, I could change the pattern. But it wouldn't be the same style like Nina's dress."

"Nina is fat. I don't need to worry about that."

"Well, if that's what you want, I will try to make them as narrow as possible and show you the lay-out before I cut the fabric. Take the fabric and preshrink it—you know the cotton shrinks a lot."

Indeed, it shrunk several centimeters making it even harder for me to fit the pattern to the fabric. The gored panels looked almost straight rather than flared at the bottom. I showed her how it looked with the pattern pinned on.

"You see," she commented, "all that you learned in school is for nothing—the merchant knew better and I saved almost half a meter off the fabric."

I basted the dress for the first fitting and pinned the front closure, she didn't complain. So, I proceeded with second fitting, and she didn't complain. To me it looked almost straight, but I didn't argue, she saved on the price of the fabric.

I finished sewing the dress Friday night and on Saturday morning, she didn't have the time to try it on and took it home. I didn't ask her to be paid for my work, as I was considering it as a compensation for using her sewing machine.

Giulio knew how much I struggled to fit the pattern to the amount of fabric his mother gave me. When he came home I told him that his mother took the dress home to try it on later. I took a long breath that it was able to make her happy. But then, as soon as we finished lunch, my mother-in-law came with the dress in her hands and threw it on the sofa screaming at me. "That's how you wanted me to look - bandaged like a salami! I told you that I wanted the dress that looks as good as Nina's. You did it intentionally to make your mother-in-law look ridiculous!"

"Mamma, you bought less fabric than I told you to buy," I tried to justify myself, "You agreed that I make the gores to fit the fabric—I had to make them narrower."

"You see, you see, Giulio, how your wife is treating me," she screamed again, "Now she is trying to switch the fault on me."

"Giulio," I turned to him, "didn't I tell you that she bought less fabric and I tried to do my best with what she gave me."

"Are you trying to put my son against me, too!" and she began to curse me. Giulio felt that the situation was getting out of control, he grabbed me by the arm, pushed me and then the children in the bedroom and closed the door. Lia, Piero and I were listening for a while to his mother screaming. She complained that she wasted all that money to buy the fabric and Giulio arguing with his mother, trying to convince her that I couldn't do better with the length of fabric that she got. That was the wrong approach. She wanted him to admit that I was guilty in planning to make her look ridiculous in that dress.

Finally, I heard Giulio asking her, "Where have you bought the fabric? Did you buy it on Porta Palazzo open market from the ambulant vendor? Well, we will buy for you the new fabric and Lala would make for you another dress exactly as Nina's. Don't you worry, you will have your dress."

"You buy the fabric and pay for the dressmaker to make me the dress."

"No, mamma, Lala will make it as she had the original pattern. And don't you argue with me any more. Or you will not have a dress."

Hearing that Giulio was telling such things to his mother, I thought that he was really upset with her. Then he told her, "Go home and not bother Lala any more." And when I heard the entrance door closed, I came out of the bedroom. Giulio told me to go to the market right away and search for the exact fabric, which I did right away.

It took me the whole afternoon to find the merchant who had the same fabric. I pulled out the top portion of the dress from my bag and moved the bolt closer so I could compare them.

"Are you trying to match the color or the design?" the merchant asked.

"Both," I replied, "I have to match them both to make another skirt for this dress."

"You need to make another skirt? What happened to the one that is there? Let me see... it is a very nice dress. I just sold this fabric to the Tuscan woman who bargained so hard for the price like her whole life depended on it. I see that it was enough to make the dress as I suggested."

"No," I said bitterly, "it was not enough to make the six-gored skirt as she wanted. And now I need more fabric to make another skirt to make her happy. I need exactly two-and-a-half meters—and don't try to sell me less as you did with the Tuscan woman."

"But, you see, the Tuscan woman was bargaining so hard and telling me that she couldn't spend more, so I suggested that she could do the dress with less. Otherwise I

would have lost the sale."

"Well, you gained another sale, but I lost by buying this fabric and working twice as much as I should have. The Tuscan woman is my mother-in-law and I need to make her happy."

"Poor *Madamin*, I am sorry for you—the Tuscan mothers-in-law are hard to live with."

"I know, you don't have to tell me about it!"

"Poor *Madamin*," repeated the merchant as she measured the fabric and I paid her without any other comments. "I am giving you a few centimeters more, just in case," she tried either to console me or to make me forgive her for her suggestion to my mother-in-law to buy less fabric.

I sewed the dress and delivered it to the fourth floor apartment, placed it on the sofa and said to my mother-in-law, "I hope that now you will be satisfied with my work—it is the exact style like I made for Nina, but it required the length of fabric as I told you to buy, not what you bought. But it is the first and the last that I made for you." And I left.

In the following days and weeks I saw her wearing the dress going to the market, it fitted her well and she didn't come to complain about my work.

After this incident I didn't talk to her for several months and she didn't come to our apartment either. I felt so good not being afraid that at any moment she could barge in the door and intrude in our life with her whimsical demands and trivial accusations—her claws couldn't reach me.

Giulio faithfully continued to visit her every evening after the supper. I didn't know what she was telling him but it seemed that she complained that I missed to send the children on some morning to greet her. So, he ordered me to send the children every morning to the fourth floor to say "Good Morning" to their grandmother. I didn't object to that—instilling the respect for their grandmother was a reasonable and good upbringing although the children were asking me, "Do we have to go there every morning?"

"Yes, because Papà wants you to do it for respect to your grandmother."

"All right, Mamma," and I would see them climbing the four flights of stairs and disappear behind their grandmother's door.

I remember that one morning I was in a hurry on my way from the market and left Lia and Piero with my neighbor Nina. My mother-in-law was walking ahead of me with another woman. I passed them without saluting. The woman asked her, "Isn't that your daughter-in-law who passed us?"

Without replying to the woman, my mother-in-law shouted at me, "Don't you say 'Hello' to your mother-in-law? You know, you may still need my help sometimes."

"I hope not," I replied, "Maybe you will need my help as you become older. But you need first to learn how to treat your daughter-in-law with respect." And I walked even faster home.

It was a long time before we began to talk to each other and before she put her foot in our apartment. During this time she would come to the door and call for Lia to take her to the market or on Sunday to the church and would return her to the door.

That was the time when I became aware of being on my way to gain independence from domineering mother-in-law.



## Epilog

# What Happened To Igor M. Gladky's Family

*By Olga Gladky Verro*

*As Recounted by Igor I. Gladky (Sr.)*

Antonina Yuliusovna Gauk Gladky with her old mother (Babushka), and the children Alfred, Nanochka, and baby Igor (Jr.) were deported by the Soviets as most people who have been taken by the Germans to Germany. Their destination was to the far regions of the Soviet Union as a punishment for having been Volksdeutsche. They were transported to the east of the Ural Mountains about 80 kilometers north of the town Term' (also known as town Molotow). It was a small hamlet named Kamskaya Sudoverf' on the northern part of the River Kama, an affluent of the River Volga. The hamlet had only one street named Morskaya and consisted of about 20 small homes where the local folks lived. There was also a ship yard for the repairs of the river steamboats where the local inhabitants and the deported Volksdeutsche families worked.

The deported Volksdeutsche families lived in a camp beyond the swamp dividing it from the hamlet. There were five very long barracks each divided in 24 rooms and each family lived in one room. The sixth barrack was allocated to a clubhouse where all meetings and social activities were held, and movies were shown.

All members of the deported worked, including teenagers and Alfred and Igor have learned there the carpenters' trade. Antonina Yuliusovna was lucky to be assigned to the entry gate-box where she had some shelter from the cold weather during the long winter months.

Children were taking care of bringing the wood in their rooms and keeping the wood stoves working until their parents and older siblings would come home. In 1950 Igor was five years old and Nanochka was thirteen years old (she was born in 1937). While in the concentration camp, Nanochka contracted the rheumatoid fever that affected her heart. On December 24 1950, after bringing the wood in the room she felt very weak and rested on the bed for a while. That evening she died without receiving any medical help.

In 1953 when Stalin died an amnesty was declared for some deported families and for the prisoners of war. However, the bureaucracy of releasing them was working slowly and Antonina Yuliusovna Gladky and her family were not released until 1956. However, they were allowed to move only to the Asiatic part of the Soviet Union. They moved to the village.....

Alfred married Varya and had two sons Rudolf and Victor. Igor married Dina and had a son Igor (Jr.) and a daughter Olga. They lived in for several years. While they were there, Olga Gladky Verro was corresponding with her good friend Zoya Litvinova and asked if her mother could find what had happened to her uncle Igor's family. Indeed, Zoya contacted her mother, Maria Sergeevna Litvinova, who returned to Slavyansk from her forced labor sooner; by word of mouth, she found people who knew what happened to them and got their address. She did send it to Zoya to Belgium who forwarded it to Olga and correspondence between them began. Although, because of

the censorship the information was very limited, but it was a joy to find out that they were alive. Of course, we mourned the premature death of Uncle Igor's daughter Nanochka. Uncle Igor was informed and was given their address and they also began to correspond and by requests of his wife, uncle Igor had sent her some packages with items that his mistress Zhenya selected. His wife complained that the items were inappropriate for the place they lived, such as high heels shoes and cheap clothing. When she demanded that Igor would mail the good wool suite for his son Igor, Zhenya had put her foot down and Igor stopped writing them and mailing packages all together.

The correspondence with her sister-in-law Antonina Berezhnaya Gladky continued and the letters were given to read to Igor by his brother. At some point they heard that Germany was accepting back the Volksdeutsche. The first to return to Germany was Alfred and Varya because her brother, who had remained in Germany, recalled them. After that Alfred recalled his mother Antonina Yuliusovna Hauck Gladky and his brother Igor, Dina and their children.

The departure assembly point was in Odessa and while they were waiting there, Antonina Yuliusovna had a stroke and was paralyzed. However, she was transported on the stretcher and they all arrived in Germany in

Alfred was an alcoholic and drifted away from the family and eventually died when he refused to have an ulcer operation. His body remained in the cemetery storage until his family was found.

Igor and Dina found a job in Mannheim working with the streetcar company; Igor worked as a janitor and Dina having a technical school as a dietician worked in the streetcar cafeteria. Igor built own home in town on the address: 68219 Mannheim 81 on Relaisstrasse 185-a. Being an experienced carpenter, most of the work he did by himself.

Igor's and Dina's daughter Olga graduated from college with engineering degree and worked for many years with a large company in Germany and married Uwe Lawhert who was also an engineer and worked at the same company; they had no children. Olga changed her profession by attending the school for natural alternative medicine and opened her own business in 2006. Their son Igor (Jr 2nd) became an entrepreneur by having a small fleet of taxi cars. He married a divorced woman who had one daughter and they had two daughters.

Alfred's son Rudolf got engineering degree and worked with the German company doing business with Russia. He married also a Volksdeutsche woman Irina and they had two sons.

Alfred's son Victor had two sons.

# What Happened to Nikolay G. Berezhnoy and His Family

*By Olga Gladky Verro*

*As Recounted by Vladimir Berezhnoy*

*(Wladimir Bereschnoy – German and Canadian spelling)*

Nikolay G. Berezhnoy with his wife Katya, daughter-in-law Lidya, and the little grandson Boris evacuated from Slavyansk with the Slavyansk Duma members. However, they didn't wanted to go to Germany but to settle in Poland, if possible in Stanislavov where they lived before the war. But the German were keeping the lines open for the military trains and those bringing the workers to Germany. Their train was held on several stations on the side tracks for many days. Nikolay decided to return with his family back home to Slavyansk. They walked for several days and arrived to Katya's aunt and uncle before the town was in the hands of the Soviet troops. The home they lived before was ransacked and someone else was already living there and they had to settle with Katya's aunt again. Lidya found herself a separate place to live and Nikolay and Katya kept their grandson Boris to live with them.

When Soviet authorities and the NKVD arrived, the investigation of the activities of the local population began to search and punish the "collaborators" with the Germans. There were plenty of informers and NKVD agents had plenty to do in interrogating and classifying those who were guilty. Nikolay was among those who with his wife and grandson were sent to the forced labor camp somewhere north of Moscow.

They served their punishment for about six years when Nikolay became sick and had problem with urinary tract but he didn't wanted to go to a female doctor with such a complaint until it was too late. Because he had a prostate cancer, they were released and returned to Slavyansk where he had undergone the operation from which he never recovered. He died from blood poisoning at the age of 65. Their older son Nikolay (Kotyk), came and helped her to burry his father.

Being a graduate from the Kharkovsky Physical Education Institute, their older son Nikolay was drafted at the beginning of the war and served in the military as an officer; he survived the war and got several medals. When he returned to Slavyansk right after the war searching for his parents, his wife, and son, his parents with his son were already in the labor camp. His aunt gave him the address where his wife lived. When he knocked at the door, a naked man who was covering his private parts with a towel opened the door. Nikolay asked if Lidia was home. Seeing the man dressed in the military uniform with lots of medals on the chest, he quickly figured out that it was Lidia's husband and he jumped out the door and began to run. Furious Nikolay chased him on the streets of Slavyansk with people stopping and laughing at the escapee. Knowing from his aunt that his son was with his parents, Nikolay divorced Lidia and married anoter woman but they didn't have any children.

As a war veteran, he quickly bult up a carreer an eventually became a director of the Kharkovsky or Stanislavov Physical Education Technicum and remained in that position until retirement having earned several medals of honor for his work and being

respected by his colleagues.

After the death of her husband, Katya remained alone in a small one room apartment and took care of grandson Boris earning money by knitting for other people. Her son Nikolay helped her by sending some money to support his son. She lived with Boris until he got married and brought his wife to live with them. Boris's marriage brought lots of pain and sorrow to Katya. His wife was drinking and didn't respect her. She moved Katya in the hall on the bed where before Boris was sleeping and she and Boris moved in Katya's room. But there was little that Katya could do about it and she continued her knitting to support herself. Boris had a son Dima who grew up as an unruly teenager and gave him a lot of trouble later in life and his wife became an alcoholic.

Nikolay's and Katya's younger son Volodya who was with his wife Raya in Germany in the Ostarbaitern camp, became a refugee after the war and their daughter Ella was born in Germany while they were waiting for the country that would accept them for work. Volodya was accepted and departed first to Canada and worked in the forests in the timber camp. His wife Raya and daughter Ella followed him several months later. They moved to the Ontario Province and earned their living by touring as entertainers performing acrobatic acts in clubs and other small entertainment establishments. Volodya and Raya stopped their entertainment business when Ella, who as a small child was also performing acrobatic acts, had to start the school and finally settled in Toronto where they purchased a small house at the address: 1075 Royal York Rd. Etobicoke, ONT, Canada M8X 2G6. Raya grew in her yard about 300 bushes of roses.

Raya found a job in the manufacturing factory and Volodya trained the young children in athletics clubs. He was able to contact his mother from Canada and offered her to join them. Katya refused because it meant to fill-in all kinds of forms with the NKVD providing information about all her family, including her older son Nikolay. That could have damaged his reputation and career. So, Volodya helped her by sending her packages with food and yarn for knitting and she was finally able to save some money and afford to leave Boris and his wife and to move into a small room of her own.

Katya died at the age of 94 and her older son Nikolay buried her in the same grave with her husband in Slavyansk.

Raya's mother Alexandra Leontiyevna Ernou had been working in Germany in an Ostarbaitern camp and she returned home voluntarily to Ukraine hoping that her husband, Pavel Ivanovich Zagoroyko, would return home from the concentration camp in Siberia. He was there since he was sentenced for ten years at the trial held when her daughter Raya had to start her first year as a student at the institute in Kharkov. She lived for a while with her husband's relatives who treated her badly and she hanged herself by ending her life in a moment of desperation.

Raya's father was freed from the concentration camp by the the amnesty to some political prisoners passed after Stalin's death.

Kolya's older son Nikolay retired from his position at the technicum but continued to be active with the physical education professionals and enjoyed attending all the professional conventions held in different parts of the country. One day when he returned from the convention after staying there for three days, he found his wife dead on the floor of their apartment. After notifying his friends about her death, he fell into deep depression and reclused himself not seeing anyone. But one woman, who was

divorced from his long time friend and was also a friend of his wife, ccontacted him repeatedly and eventually made him to move to Kharkov where she lived. Nikolay had a room there and she moved to live with him and took care of him.

After the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, Volodya invited and his daughter paid for the trip for his brother and his female companion to visit him in Canada. It was a memorable trip and a revelation for both brothers. One, wondering about the prosperous life in Canada, admiring the market in Toronto where they made their photo between the rows of the hanging salamis and showcases of gourmet foods, enjoying the stay in his nieces beautiful home with a swimming pool where they swam and swam from mornings until night and Raya prepared them delicious meals. And the other, realizing that his family was blessed by being destined to live in such a wonderful country that gave them freedom and prosperous life.

After all, Volodya's and Raya's daughter Ella married a heir to the fortune of the Toronto Star, Bill Camble. They had two sons, Jeff and Bill. Although Ella's husband died when his sons were just the teenagers from Cohn's disease as a complication of Diebetis that he had from birth. Ella inherited her husbands fortune and her sons were provided by the trust set up by their grandparents. Ella enjoyed leisurely life of playing golf, traveling and participating in golf tournaments and later married a golf enthusiast .....and spending the winter time in her home in Miami, Florida. However, her new husband began to drink and she divorced him who by the Canadian law as a husband not having of his own income, was entitled for a settlement from his wife for a considerable sum.

Both Ella's sons were good in business. Bill, the older, was involved in the housing market in Toronto rehabilitating the old buildings, and Jeff, the younger, spent three years in New York in the stock market and returned to Canada savvy in the financial business.

After retirement Volodya and Raya had for a while a small place near the lake where they cultivated the fruit threes and enjoyed the summer months there. But after Raya was diagnosed with leukemia and was treated for it for many years. Then when she was diagnosed with the skin cancer, they sold the place and remained to live in their Etobicoke home. Raya died in 2005.

For many years Volodya was afflicted by arthritis of the spine as a result of acrobatic abuse when he was working with his wife and daughter in the beginning of their life in the new country. His health has deteriorated rapidly after his wife's death, he couldn't walk any more safely even using the walker and falling often. By 2007 his mind began to be affected by Alzheimer's. His daughter Ella took good care of him by hiring an elderly couple to take care of his daily needs and to care of her mother's roses in the garden.

# What Happened To Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy

*By Olga Gladky Verro*

*As Recounted by Anna Gavriylovna Berezhnoy*

Soon after Slavyansk was retaken by the Soviets, Gavriyl Daniylovich's daughter Anna Gavriylovna (Nyusya) returned to to find out what happened to her father during the war. She found him lying in bed semi-conscious sick with cancer. His second wife Anna Petrovna was not taking good care of him—he was not fed and not cleaned probably for days. When Nyusya confronted her, she declared that she herself was not able to do it and had no money to hire anybody. She said that now, that his daughter arrived, she should provide her father with the care he needed.

Nyusya came to Slavyansk with her little daughter Svetlana and couldn't remain there. She decided to move her father to his native village of Nikolskoye where she would ask father's brother Stepan's daughters to take care of him by giving them a few of the father's belongings. She hired a man with the horse and wagon, loaded his father's sewing machine, tailor's table, and all his tailor's implements and a few personal things, put his father as comfortable as it was possible on the wagon, then she accommodated herself beside the driver holding on her knees her toddler's daughter and they departed to Nikolskoye.

The nieces accepted to take care of their uncle and took care of him. But he didn't live very long. Nyusya returned there for the funeral and her father was put to rest in the village where he was born.

# What Happened To Ivan G. Berezhnoy and His Family

*By Olga Gladky Verro*

*As Recounted by Yelena Ivanovna Berezhnoy Mykailova*

# Appendix

# Appendix A

## Names of People

**Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky (1895-1999)**

**Antonina G. Berezhnaya** – a daughter of Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy and Natalia Iosyfovna Grudzinskaya Berezhnaya

**Berezhnaya, Antonina G.**

Also spelled: Hladka, Antonina; Hladkaja, Antonina

Nicknames: Tonya, Tonyechka

**Orest Mikhailovich. Gladky (1902-1983)**

**Orest M. Gladky**

**Gladky, Orest M.**

Also spelled: Hladkij, Orest M.

Nickname: Rostik

Pseudonims: O. Michailov, O Mikhaylov, O. Mykhaylov, R. Chongar,

**Olga Gladky Verro (1923-)**

**Olga, Gladky** – daughter of Orest M. Gladky and Antonina G. Berezhnaya Gladky  
**Gladky, Olga**

**Verro, Olga**

Nicknames: Olya, Olyechka, Olyen'ka

Nicknames: Lyalya, Lyalyechka, Lyal'ka, Lala

**Giulio Verro. (1915-1995)**

**Verro, Giulio**

Nicknames: Gyul'ka, Giulyen'ka

Alias: Giulio Villani

**Nikita Sergyeevich. Khrushchev (.....)**

**Khrushchev, Nikita S.**

**Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy**

**Berezhnoy, Gavriyl D.** – father of Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky

**Berezhnoy, Gavriyl Daniylovich**

Nickname: Gavryusha

**Natalia Iosyfovna Grudzinskaya Berezhnaya** – mother of Antonina Gavriylovna Berezhnaya Gladky

**Grudzinskaya, Natalia Iosyfovna**

**Nikolay Gavriylovich Berezhnoy (1893-.....)**

**Berezhnoy, Nikolay Gavriylovich:** son of Gavriyl Daniylovich Berezhnoy and Natalia Iosyfovna Grudzinskaya

Nickname: Kolya

**Gladky Igor Mikhailovich**

**Igor M. Gladky**

Nickname: Igoryek



## **Appendix B**

### **Names of Places**

Petrograd